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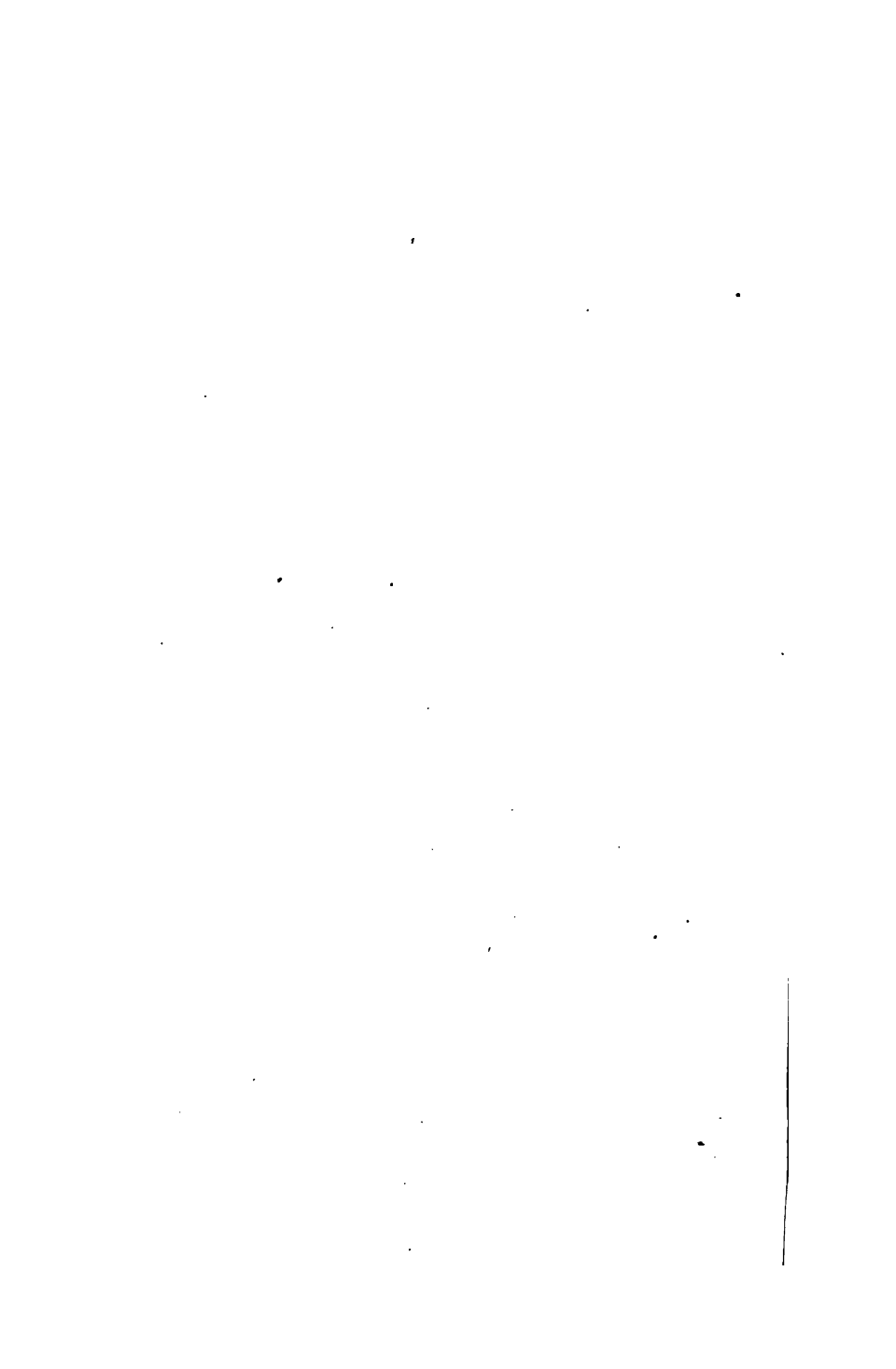
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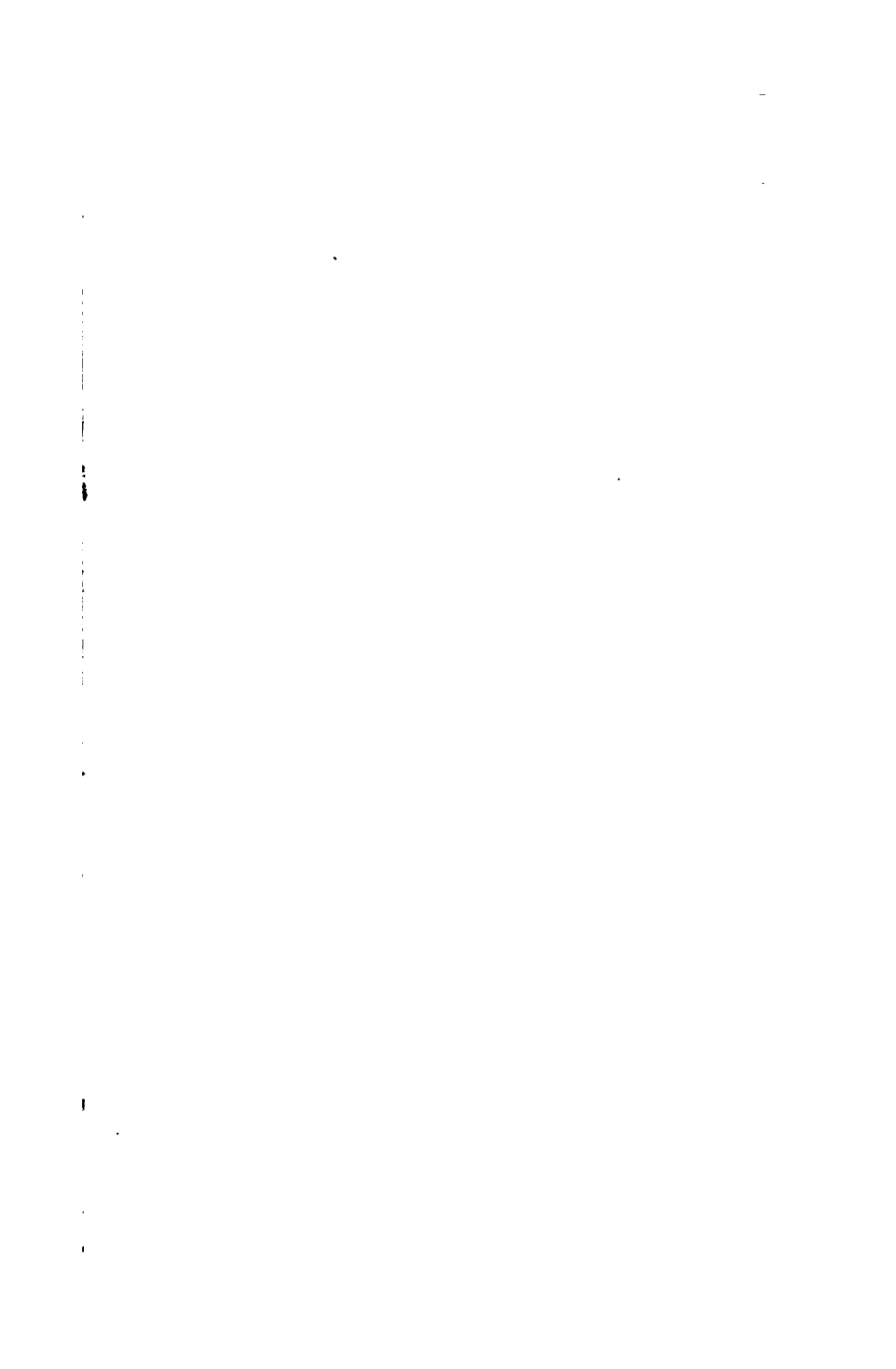
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THE YOUNG GOLD-DIGGER.







The wounded Deer.

THE

YOUNG GOLDFISH

A FINE BOOK

BY

A. P. GOLDSMITH

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY J. H. B. HARRIS

LONDON,

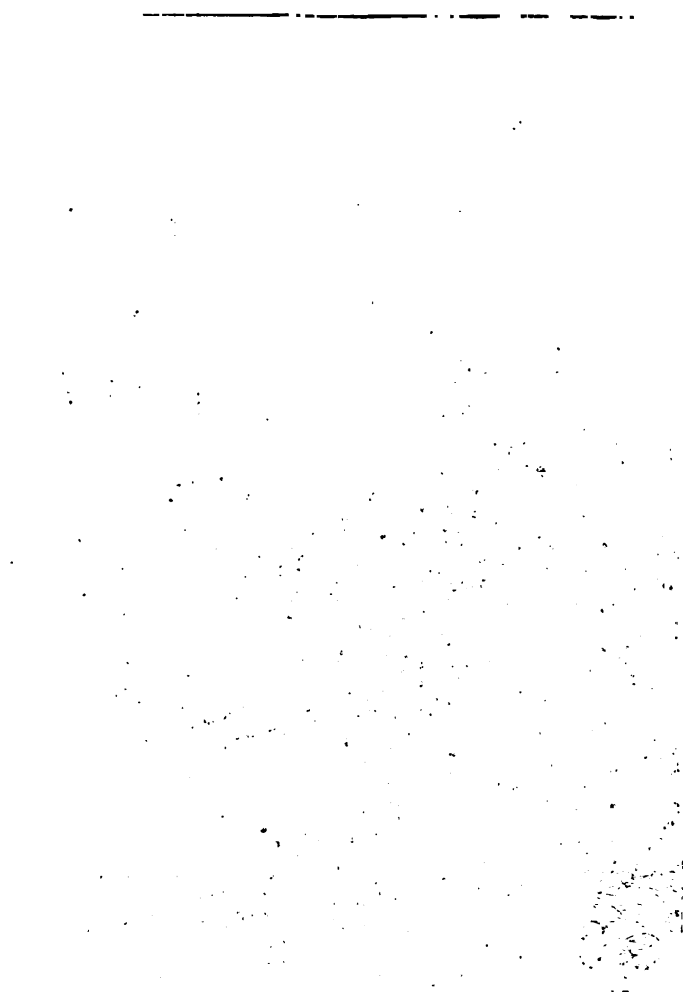
FOOTLEDGE, WARNE & FOOTLEDGE,

FARRINGTON STREET;

NEW YORK, 50 WALKER STREET

1880.

242.2.500.



THE
YOUNG GOLD-DIGGER;

OR,

A Boy's Adventures in the Gold Regions.

BY

F. GERSTAECKER,

AUTHOR OF "WILD SPORTS IN THE WEST," "FRANK WILDMAN'S
ADVENTURES," ETC. ETC. ETC.

LONDON:
ROUTLEDGE, WARNE, & ROUTLEDGE,
FARRINGTON STREET;
NEW YORK: 56, WALKER STREET.
1860.

249.3.601.



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THE YOUNG GOLD-DIGGER.

CHAPTER I.

ABOUT CERTAIN TRAVELLERS: HOW THEY WERE CAUGHT IN THE SNOW, AND SENT GEORGE OFF TO LOOK FOR HELP.

IT was about the end of September, in the year 1849. The snow had begun to fall in the Californian mountains much earlier in the season than usual, and in uncommonly heavy masses; and many a caravan of emigrants had been overtaken by the blinding storm, who had hoped to gain the sheltered lowlands before the setting in of the cold weather.

When the first report of the mineral wealth of California penetrated to the United States of America, the majority of the emigrants whom the news attracted to the golden shores took passage on board ship to reach the distant land by sea. But this route was a terribly circuitous one. First, the travellers were compelled to sail down along the entire coast of South America, to Cape Horn, its southern extremity,—which they had to double, and then to make their way back along the east coast—a very dangerous voyage, which was sure, under the most favourable circumstances, to occupy four months, and was not unfrequently found to require six, seven, or even eight for its accomplishment.

Notwithstanding these disadvantages, however, there were not ships enough to be had to accommodate all the eager applicants for berths ; and as the line of steamboats which now conveys passengers to Panama, from whence they are at once carried on by other vessels on the opposite side of the isthmus, had not yet been established, thousands of travellers made up their minds to attempt the long and laborious journey by land, across the mountains to California, rather than wait their opportunity to procure a passage by sea. The fact was, people's heads were full of visions of wealth and gain ; and they fancied, if they could only once get to California, gold might be had there, like pebble-stones, for the mere trouble of picking it up.

In order to perceive, my dear young reader, what a terrible undertaking this overland journey was, and still is, to the present day, you need only take a map of North America in your hand, and trace the enormous space these emigrants had to traverse—first through vast steppes or plains, uninhabited save by tribes of prowling savages, and then across lofty mountains, steep and pathless. They were obliged to carry with them, in lumbering waggons, drawn by oxen, the provisions for the whole journey, and not unfrequently a supply of water ; and thus they could only advance by slow and wearisome marches continued from day to day.

Many died on the journey ; and melancholy stories were told in the settlements—how the road the caravans had taken might be traced for miles and miles by little mounds of earth thrown up by the wayside. But for all that, the survivors pressed forward restlessly towards the goal of their wanderings—the famous land of gold,—leaving their loved ones to moulder in silent graves out in the lonely steppe.

Their journey was a true picture of our life here below. Though the nearest and dearest may fall around us, we can do no more than weep for them, and pass on. The course of life hurries us forward unceasingly; and happy are those who have a better aim in view than earthly gain—the treasure that “moth and rust doth corrupt.”

These caravans of emigrants—for a number of waggons generally travelled in company, for greater safety against the attacks of Indians—almost invariably left the United States at the end of April or the beginning of May, in order to achieve the passage of the Rocky Mountains before the setting in of winter. In spite of this precaution, many were surprised by the snow on those desolate heights, some unforeseen circumstances having delayed them on their journey. Illness among the passengers, or the straying of the oxen, and similar accidents, frequently obliged the proprietor of a waggon to let the rest of the caravan pass him; and then it was a question whether the most strenuous exertions would enable him to overtake his companions. Some families perished utterly; and many were delayed so long, that they had to encounter horrible privations and dangers before they reached their journey's end.

Of one of these families I have now to speak.

The Rocky Mountains, as many of my young readers are no doubt aware, form a portion of that immense mountain-chain which extends throughout the entire American continent, from the north frigid zone, down through the Isthmus of Panama, and so through the whole of South America, till, at Cape Horn—the promontory we have just mentioned—it plunges its enormous gray masses into the storm-tossed ocean. This chain, which is very appropriately termed the “backbone” of America, is known under various names. In the north, we speak

of it as the "Rocky Mountains;" in the neighbourhood of the equator and in Central America, we call it the "Andes Range;" and in South America, the "Cordilleras."

The Rocky Mountains do not consist of a single row of very high peaks, flanked by the flat steppe to the east and west, but of a number of parallel chains, of which the central one, as the principal ridge, is the highest, being separated from the nearest, and the next in height, by a narrow valley, broken here and there by rugged acclivities.

On the Californian side there are three such ridges, of which the second is scarcely inferior in elevation to the main or principal range, from which the streams roll down,—on the east, into the Atlantic, and on the west, into the Pacific ocean.

This second western range is called, in Spanish, the "Sierra Nevada," or snowy chain. The third ridge lies much lower; and before the family whose adventures I have to relate could reach it, they had to traverse a broad plain; then they came to the mountains next the sea, among which, in the transverse spurs or ranges towards the Pacific, the gold had just been discovered, in quest of which so many wanderers had come.

True to its name, the ridge of the Sierra Nevada is never, even in summer time, free from snow. Our travellers, indeed, found a very well-defined track left by the heavy carts and sledges that had preceded them; but the little waggon with whose proprietors we have now to do, had lost two of its oxen among the mountains, through over exertion and scanty food, and it could proceed only by such easy stages as the poor attenuated beasts could undertake.

Favoured by the brightest of weather, the party had

already pushed forward as far as the last mountains, and believed they had surmounted the worst part of their trials, when the before-mentioned heavy and early fall of snow came suddenly upon them.

Every trace of the path taken by former waggons was quickly obliterated by the falling flakes; and though the proprietor of the vehicle—a sturdy, weather-beaten backwoodsman from the western states—could undertake to find his way in spite of this accident, a more important difficulty existed, in the fact that the poor thin oxen could hardly tug the waggon along through the deepening drifts.

The waggon itself was a massive heavy affair, with a strong body and thick broad wheels, well calculated to bear the strain of a rough mountain journey. It was covered with a tilt, or canopy, of tarred canvas; and thus served as a tent for the family by night, besides carrying all that they possessed of worldly wealth by day.

The little party comprised, besides the tall, square-built, sturdy man, his son George, his wife, and a little daughter scarcely three years old. George was a boy of about fourteen or fifteen years of age, or perhaps not quite so old: for heavy work, such as the little fellow had already been accustomed to do, brings young people forward, and makes them look older than they really are. The little man had been useful to his father, in more ways than one, during their long, toilsome journey; and the father and son could, in case of the worst, have easily extricated themselves from their dilemma, had it not been for George's mother and the little helpless girl. The mother had been in a weak state for some time, and her feeble health imperatively required that she should have every comfort and indulgence that could be procured for her on the rough road.

It was a heavy time for the poor woman, with her little child, to be exposed, month after month, to heat and cold, to snow and storm; to have to tend the helpless infant, and to feel so ill all the time. Many a poor mother had already, on that rough road, shed bitter tears, and thought yearningly and regretfully of the time when she had lived, perhaps in poverty, but still in a peaceful home of her own; and many a man even had repented the rashness which made him leave his cottage. But such thoughts came too late; retreat was impossible, and the only thing to be done now, was to push on, and finish their journey with all the courage they could muster.

Until now they had always been able to advance, though their progress might be slow; and the hope of soon entering a milder region increased with each mile they left behind them. But this morning a calamity had happened. The last but one of their oxen had fallen, and could not be got on his legs again; and the last survivor of their team could drag the waggon no further.

Thus they sat in the midst of the forest, with the ground covered almost a foot deep in snow, and no human aid near.

When the ox fell, George had cleared the snow from around the waggon, while his father occupied himself about the poor beast, and lighted a brisk fire. Fallen branches were to be had in abundance, and the warm blaze was a great comfort to the poor mother and her little child. But what was to be done now? Even if they left the waggon and all it contained behind them, the sick woman would never be able to walk through the deep snow; and help must therefore be procured, in one way or another.

The father proposed that George should stay to take

care of his mother and sister, while he himself went to try and find out some human being from whom he could borrow an ox or a mule. If matters came to the worst, a horse would have sufficed to carry the mother and child down into the valley. But could he trust his helpless wife to the young lad's protection? There were Indians in the neighbourhood, and wolves; and something might happen, to which the boy's strength was unequal. So, at last, after long and anxious consideration, he spoke to his son on the subject.

"George," he said, "I have thought the matter over, and think it will be best for you to make your way into the valley, which you can do by following the course of the brook, and try if you can get hold of a horse, a mule, or an ox. I don't like the look of this snow; and, though it's not late in the season yet, it won't do to run the chance of the winter's coming upon us up here. Providence has helped us wonderfully till now, through all our dangers and troubles; so we must now put our own shoulders to the wheel a bit, in order not to be bowled over at the end of our journey."

"Yes, father, I'll go willingly," answered the boy; "but where am I to look for people? Aren't we perhaps hundreds of miles away from the nearest settlements—and whenever should I get back?"

"No, my boy," answered the backwoodsman, in a decided tone; "neighbour Woolsey, who left us a week ago—he might have held out a little longer with us, by the way; but this gold seems to have turned every one's head,—he knows the place, and told me then, already that we weren't a hundred miles from the first mining village. Since then we've, at any rate, done ten or twelve miles a day; and who knows if there are not settlers quite in the neighbourhood?"

"Very well, father,—I'm off; but I may take Hector with me, I suppose?"

"The dog? Well, I don't know if we can very well spare him. But do as you like; perhaps he may be useful to you."

"And you'll wait for me here till I come back?"

"Certainly," replied his father; "I'll employ myself in the mean time cutting a couple of poles, to make some sort of a sledge. If the snow lies, which I don't, however, suppose it will do, we'll take the wheels off the waggon again, and pack them inside, as we've had to do already, up yonder in the mountains. If we have to leave the waggon behind us after all, why then the work will have kept me warm, at any rate."

"But will the boy be able to find his way back to us?" asked the mother, anxiously. "So long as we kept together, I have been able to endure everything without repining; but suppose the boy should lose his way, what should we do then?"

"Don't alarm yourself about me, mother," cried the lad, with a laugh; "haven't I been accustomed to spend my time in the woods and swamps at home, for days and days together, and yet never lost my way once?—and that was in the flat country, too. Here, in the mountains, one need only keep close to some stream or other, to be sure of going right. Besides, you know, Hector's going with me; and we two will be sure to find our way, and bring you help."

"Still, I am very, very anxious about you," sighed the mother. "I wish to Heaven we had never thought of coming to this terrible California."

"Come, my little woman," said her husband, in gentler tones than one would have expected to hear from a man of his rough appearance, "you musn't

yourself up to such dismal thoughts : keep a stiff upper lip, and I hope all will go well. You know I can't bring you into all this danger and hardship through being greedy after gold ; and, after all, it was your own particular wish to set out, and try to find your father here."

The mother hid her face in her hands, and big tears rolled out between her poor thin white fingers, and fell into her lap. But she made no further objection to the departure of the boy, to whom her husband gave very particular instructions as to how he should proceed in his expedition.

George was soon ready to start. Brought up, as he had been, in the woods, and accustomed, like all back-woodsmen's children, from his eighth year to hunt wild animals and to fell trees, he did not fear to encounter any of the savage denizens of the forest. He was, moreover, certain of being able to find his way. The weather had already cleared up, and the sun stood high in the heavens. There was no chance of missing the steep bed which the stream had hollowed out for itself among the rocks ; and, even if he swerved aside from its course, he could easily find it again. So he proceeded, light-heartedly enough, to buckle up his woollen blanket, in the folds of which he deposited some provisions his mother had given him ; then, shouldering his musket, and whistling to Hector, he cheerfully bade his mother and sister good-bye, and marched off into the silent, deserted, snow-covered forest.

You European children, who grow up in affluence, and are tended and taught by the care of affectionate parents, little think how many thousands of young creatures have to fight with the difficulties of life, and to toil hard for the bread they eat, at an age when you would think them

powerless to act without the fostering protection of grown-up friends. No need to go out to the wilderness, to the darksome forest, to find these children. Thousands of them are living in the closest contact with you; and you may find them readily, if you will only take the trouble to look round. How many suffer want, while you enjoy plenty; how many are cold, while you can gain pleasant knowledge, or indulge in merry sport, in the warm comfortable room! It is true, you cannot help them all. God has seen fit, in His wisdom, to distribute His gifts unequally in the world; and, according to His inscrutable will, a large number of the human family are obliged to toil through life with much pain and labour, while others seem to run their course easily, without let or hindrance. Oh, all ye who belong to this latter class, be thankful—deeply thankful; and look not enviously at those above, but pitifully and helpfully at those around and *below* you. Learn to limit your wishes within a reasonable compass, and seek for that greatest of all earthly gifts—a thankful and contented heart.

CHAPTER II.

GEORGE'S SOLITARY MARCH THROUGH THE MOUNTAINS.

THE poor mother felt her heart sink within her when she saw her boy thus turn away alone into the wood, which now seemed to her twice as solitary and formidable as before. Even the hardy backwoodsman felt anxious when he saw himself compelled to let his son go. He knew well enough what hardships George would have to encounter, even under the most favourable circumstances, and that if anything were really to happen to the lad out in the woods, there would not be a human creature near to stretch out a helping hand to him.

"Well, well!—we are all in the hand of God; and without Him not a sparrow can fall from the roof, or a hair of our head be injured," was the reflection with which he at last consoled himself. Besides, the step was called for by the most imperative necessity; for, if help did not come, it seemed but too probable that the mother and her little daughter would fall victims to the cold, rough mountain winds.

George, meanwhile, was striding sturdily on. I do not mean to say that his heart did not beat thick and fast at first, when he lost sight of his friends, and found himself all alone among the great, tall, snow-laden trees: but another feeling soon restored him to composure. His young heart bounded with exultation; for now, for the first time in his life, he was treated like an independent *man*, who was expected to think and act for himself. His

father had despatched him to bring them help in their distress. He saw that confidence had been placed in him, and he felt twice as strong as before in his determination that his father should not be deceived in him.

Accustomed to wander through the woods, he found no difficulty in keeping a western course, in spite of the numerous windings of the little stream. He did not, however, neglect to observe certain landmarks as he went on, and even took care to mark a tree with his knife every now and then, as he came to spots where their waggon would have to avoid a bad place, or to turn aside to find an easier passage. He certainly could not advance very rapidly; for walking was difficult, on account of the deep snow, and he, moreover, stopped frequently, to listen to the faintest sound that resembled the tones of the human voice or the sharp ring of an axe. Each time such sounds were heard, his heart would leap up and begin to beat violently; and he had often to call up all his fortitude to prevent himself from giving way; for each time he was disappointed, and the noises which raised his hopes were caused by only a bough breaking under its load of snow, a bird screaming as it flew above his head, or a woodpecker tapping a hollow trunk in search of insects.

As he descended the mountain-slope, the snow gradually decreased; and at last he reached a tolerably sheltered valley, where the ground was only covered by a thin crust, broken here and there.

This valley, certainly, lay quite in a different direction from the course he intended to take: it stretched away towards the south, and for a time he felt doubtful as to the propriety of following it. Besides, the steep bank of the stream sloped so precipitously down towards the valley, that he felt very doubtful as to how their waggon could be

got along. Higher up, a passage might, indeed, have been difficult, but, at any rate, would not be impossible; but here the vehicle would have been exposed to the greatest danger at every turn of the wheels. Indeed, on descending a little further, he found the bank changed into a complete wall of rock, some thirty feet in height, so that he was obliged to go back a little distance before he could wade across the stream on foot.

So the poor little lad stood at last, leaning on his gun, looking in woful indecision, now at the sun, rapidly sinking towards the west, now at the valley, which gave promise of a milder climate. Oh, for some sign to tell him where he should first meet with men!

Hector, meanwhile, had been industriously snuffing and searching about among the snow, which he had begun to scratch up in one or two places. George paid little attention to him, for he had noticed several deer-tracks leading through the wood in different directions. Traces of foxes and wolves had also appeared; and once he saw the footsteps of the most formidable denizen of those woods—the grizzly bear,—traces which Hector seemed more than half inclined to follow up.

George took little notice of the dog, but concentrated his whole attention upon the question, what direction he should follow. At length he resolved, in spite of the steep and uninviting appearance of the high mountains, to keep steadily to his westerly course. No one could tell how far the valley might lure him from the direct road; and by steadily resisting all temptations to swerve to the right or left, he would most likely avoid making a considerable circuit. So, with a sigh that came from the bottom of his heart, he shouldered his gun, and, whistling to Hector, turned away to climb the next hill. But Hector would not come. The more his master called,

the more did the dog scratch and snuff at a certain spot in the snow; and, curious at last to see what was the matter, George went up to where his dog was at work.

George saw, at the first glance, that Hector had smelt out an old camping-place, where a fire had been made, and over whose ashes the snow had fallen lightly,—perhaps since the previous night. There had been men here, that was certain; and, on looking more closely, he even fancied he could distinguish the track of wheels under the light covering of snow. On carefully moving the loose layer of flakes, he found his suspicions verified. A waggon had passed here; and its course must have been along the valley, for the strongest team that ever tugged at a yoke could not have dragged a cart up the steep mountain-side. But how many days might not have passed since these wheel-tracks were made?—and was there any chance of his overtaking the waggon?—and was he justified in going so far from his parents?—These were grave questions. But, on the other hand, as affairs now stood, there seemed a better prospect of help in this direction than by climbing the mountain and plunging into some unknown wilderness. After a short deliberation, therefore, the young emigrant determined to follow the track he had thus opportunely discovered, and to keep close to the margin of the stream, which flowed in a winding course through the valley.

He could not continue his march much longer that day. Night came on; and, as twilight in America is very short, it soon grew so dark that he could hardly see to pick his way among the bushes which grew thickly in the valley.

The prospect of “camping out” at night did not disturb him: he had been accustomed to it during his whole life, and more than ever since his parents started

for California. A fire was soon kindled, near a fallen tree, on a space from which he cleared the snow. Then he collected a few long strips of bark, to serve for a mattress, and made the best arrangements the circumstances permitted for his comfort. The excitement of the day had prevented him from feeling hungry; but now the little store of provisions his mother had packed up for him, seemed a perfect godsend, and he made a hearty meal on a hunch of bread and a slice of cold meat, washed down by a draught of coffee, hastily prepared in his tin drinking-can.

"Hunger is a good cook," says a German proverb; and if ever there was truth in a proverb, there is in this. Youngsters who sit at plentiful boards, and declare that they *can't eat* this, and they *don't like* the other, have never felt real hunger, or known what it is to be in want. Once learn this lesson, and everything will seem good that is at all eatable; even dry bread will become a luxury to the boy who knows what it is to be without a crust. These, too, are the times of tardy and useless regret for wastefulness and ingratitude in the midst of plenty

George had nothing to reproach himself with on this score. He despatched his simple meal with a quiet, thankful heart, and then, with his faithful Hector by his side, he wrapped himself in his thin woollen blanket, to pass the night away by the fire as best he might.

His bed was hard enough, in all conscience: he had no pillow but a little moss, spread over the remainder of his stock of provisions. But the day's march had been tiring enough to render all deficiencies of little consequence; in a few minutes he slept soundly and well.

In the middle of the night something suddenly woke

him. At first he had a vague feeling of being pulled and twitched by some one, and he opened his eyes, but did not move. The fire had almost burnt itself out, and heavy clouds covered the sky, which had been starry when he went to sleep. It was all dark around him, and everything seemed quiet. The dog was lying, coiled up, between his master and the fire, fast asleep. George at last concluded he must have been dreaming, and was going to compose himself to sleep, when he distinctly felt something pulling at the moss which served him for a pillow.

The young traveller's first thought was—"Indians," but a moment's reflection convinced him that the Indians would not have waited so long if they had any hostile intentions towards him; for he had been in their power many hours:—no, it could not be Indians. Suddenly aroused from his first sleep, and still in some bewilderment as to his position, George thought it best to keep quite still, and only grasped his gun, which lay convenient to his hand, under the blanket. There was another tug; this time he felt it quite plainly, and was convinced that he was not dreaming, but had to contend with something real—probably some enemy. In a moment he sprang up, rifle in hand, just in time to distinguish some dark object that hastened away over the snow, and disappeared among the bushes.

Hector had been disturbed by his master's sudden rising; and, either because he caught sight of the dark object before mentioned, or perhaps only following his instinct, he dashed after it like lightning, and a minute afterwards, a short sharp howl announced that he had come in contact with their nocturnal visitor, whoever the latter might be.

The affair did not conclude so quietly as it had begun.

It seemed as if the whole forest had sprung at once into life. There was a crackling and rustling in the bushes, and then a confused sound of howling, barking, and whining voices ; and suddenly Hector appeared in full flight, running at the top of his speed towards the fire, with a dark mass after him.

George did not hesitate long. He could not take accurate aim in the dark, but he fired at random, in the direction of the mass ; and when the report had ceased to echo among the mountains, there was again silence, and the dark mass seemed to have vanished into the earth, as if by magic.

George hastened to throw upon the fire a great faggot of wood he had collected the evening before, and loaded his rifle, in readiness for an attack. Hector stood beside him, with bristling hair, showing his teeth and growling angrily.

"Why, what's the matter with the dog?" exclaimed George. "What's amiss, old Hector? There's been a fight, I fancy, and you've had to run for it."

Hector growled discontentedly in reply.

"Come, grumbling will do no good," said the youngster, with a laugh ; "but let them come again,—we'll receive them, won't we, Hector?"

For a time he stood with his gun ready for action, but the disturbance was not renewed. The wood was black and silent as ever ; only there was a threatening sound of wind among the trees,—and by the light of the fire, which now blazed brightly up, the sky looked blacker and more gloomy than ever.

The weather had certainly changed, as it often does, just at midnight. It had grown warmer, and the air blowing up the valley felt quite oppressive. George felt very uneasy ; for if bad weather set in, what would

become of his poor weak mother and of his little sister ? And now the wind began to moan more loudly among the lofty pine-trees, and he almost fancied he could hear, afar off towards the north-east, the rolling of distant thunder.

He was not left long in uncertainty as to what kind of weather was in store for him. As the storm came nearer, it brought with it a cold, driving rain, mingled with sleet ; and as the wind rose, the trees in the forest began to crack, and great branches came crashing down upon the ground.

Luckily George had established his head-quarters close by the river, at a spot where there were fir-trees ; and though he was more exposed to the fury of the tempest, he had less to fear from falling boughs. There was nothing for it, but to set up a couple of strips of bark, as a protection for his fire, to prevent its becoming extinguished, and then to wrap himself up in his blanket, and turn his back upon the storm.

And down it came upon him presently, in all its fury. The wind howled among the gigantic stems, snow and hail beat down ruthlessly upon the thin blanket, and the whole forest seemed in commotion. Hector shivered, cowering close up to his master ; and from the neighbouring thicket the wolves began to howl in a most dismal and discordant way. The boy knew he had nothing to fear from these creatures, who are cowardly, except in the depth of winter, when hard pressed by hunger ; but still he felt far from happy, as he crouched hour after hour in the pitiless storm, shivering with cold, and full of concern for the anxiety he knew his parents must feel on his account.

At last the weather began to moderate. Snow still continued to fall ; but the tempest had passed by, and

George was able to rekindle the almost extinguished embers of his fire, and to warm himself at the blaze. The last hour of night dragged slowly by ; and when the morning at length broke, cold and dismal, he found, to his dismay, that a thick layer of snow had again fallen. Whatever would his poor parents do, he thought ruefully, up yonder in the mountains ?

Still, the daylight seemed to inspire him with new courage ; and, as the snow ceased to fall soon after dawn, and the sky showed patches of blue, he hastened to dry his blanket as well as he could, and then proceeded to search under the moss for the provisions he had quite forgotten during the height of the commotion. The aspect of things here was not cheering. His whole stock had been completely wetted, and thoroughly spoiled ; but it was of no use to grumble. He made shift to breakfast as well as he could ; and a tin can of coffee, which he managed somehow to boil, had at any rate the effect of warming him to some extent.

Before he set forward on his day's journey, he resolved at least to try and discover some trace of his last night's visitor. All footsteps round his resting-place were, of course, obliterated by the snow ; but perhaps the shot he fired might have had some effect. At any rate, it seemed worth while to let Hector search.

Arrived at what he guessed to be the place where he had fired his gun, he could find nothing to indicate that the shot had told. Everything lay buried under a mantle of snow. But Hector's hair began to bristle up again, and with a low growl, he put out his nose cautiously, and marched away into the thicket. George followed him, with his gun ready for action ; and he judged they had about reached the spot where the dog had been attacked and put to flight on the previous night, when Hector

stood still beside a little heap of snow, and began barking furiously. George went up, and began to push the snow aside with his foot. Presently he encountered a soft substance; and the next moment he had disinterred the body of one of the little cayotas, or prairie wolves, which abound in the Californian forest.

They are little animals, not much larger than a good-sized English fox. They are of a darkish-gray colour, and very gregarious, always appearing in large flocks.

George examined the dead cayota, to see if he could discover any wound; but the fur seemed quite uninjured, except that it was a little ruffled at the nape of the neck. Hector had evidently seized the poor little wolf, and killed him with a sudden shake; and then, when the other cayotas, alarmed by their companion's cries, came to the rescue, he had thought it prudent to retreat before the overwhelming force. The dog really seemed to be rather ashamed of having killed such an insignificant foe; for though he had at first marched rather boastfully round the dead body, he soon abandoned the place, and looked wistfully at his master, as if to deprecate his stay.

George had no time to spare. The dead wolf was of no value, and it was high time to try and obtain help for his parents.

Just by his camping-place, hardly a hundred paces distant from his fire, a deer had passed across the valley. The traces of his hoofs appeared plainly visible in the snow. The season was at its height for venison; and George, like a true young hunter, would have been only too glad to follow up the traces, on the almost certain prospect of overtaking and killing the deer. He was, moreover, short of provisions; his bread was completely sodden by the wet weather, and Hector, to whom he had

given the crumb, seemed not to have had half enough. But he dared not follow his inclination. The deer had started off across the stream, in the direction from which George had come; to follow it would consume too much time; and, moreover, the probability was that he would get a shot at something during the day.

So he forced himself away from the fresh footmarks, and Hector, who could not at all make out what had come to his master, stood for a long time looking at him in wonder; but as George walked sturdily on, without once turning his head, Hector was obliged at last to follow him, which he did with a most reluctant slowness.

The valley here became broader, and the banks of the stream appeared here and there overgrown with sedge. This George knew was a sure sign that he was approaching the flat low land; and the chances were, that he was not far from a plain, where he would be sure to find inhabitants; so he strode boldly on beside the thicket that grew by the stream, and extended almost to the foot of the hill. And here he noticed, for the first time, a fruit which grew in great abundance on bushes like stunted cherry-trees, and whose ripe berries looked tempting enough to the hungry boy.

The fruit hung in bunches of about six or eight. The leaves bore a great resemblance to those of the cherry-tree, and some of the berries which he crushed had stones just like the common cherry. He felt rather reluctant at first to taste them, as he was unacquainted with Californian fruits, and feared these tempting berries might be poisonous. But Hector seemed to have no such scruples. As soon as he saw his young master stop and handle the red fruit, he came running up, sniffed at them very carefully, and then pulled down a berry and

tasted it. He seemed particularly pleased with the taste, for he proceeded to take a whole bunch into his mouth, leaving the stalks hanging from the tree; then he tried a second and a third bunch, and ended by making a hearty meal.

George hereupon took courage to taste the fruit himself. He knew, as a backwoodsman, that animals have a remarkable amount of instinct with regard to hurtful plants, and that they scarcely ever voluntarily touch a poisonous fruit; still he tasted the strange fruit very carefully at first, till the taste convinced him that it was nothing more than a kind of cherry, growing in bunches or clusters like grapes. He also found ripe hazel-nuts on other bushes, and plenty of raspberries, of which he made a delicious repast. With such an addition to his stock of provisions, he was not afraid of suffering want in the wood; and so he walked on resolutely with renewed strength.

Hector began all at once to behave very strangely. He raised his head and began snuffing the air, now on this side, now on that; sometimes, too, he would stop, and then run on, barking and growling, to overtake his master. George looked round attentively, but could not discover anything that looked suspicious. The snow still covered the ground so thickly, that, though it did not hinder his advance, it quite effaced all traces of footmarks or of waggon-wheels.

The dog was manifestly too cunning a fellow to make a disturbance without reason, and George now proceeded on his way with greater caution. He had thus walked for about half an hour, and had just ascended a little acclivity, to "cut off a corner" from a mountain which rose steeply from the ridge, when he suddenly saw smoke rising from the valley below him.

So he had found *men* at last. His heart beat almost audibly, and with a loud shout of joy he started forward to meet the friends whom he had so long wished to encounter; when Hector growled again, louder than before, and his hair began to bristle up on his back. Now, George knew by experience that the dog was very tolerant, except in three cases—those of wolves, negroes, or Indians; and might he not be here throwing himself into the hands of a party of red-skins? In his wanderings through the prairies, he had only seen the worst side of the Indian character, and the tales of horror, of sudden and bloody attacks by Indians, with which the neighbours at home had enlivened the twilight hour round the blazing hearth, seemed to come back upon his memory with a very painful distinctness.

But what was to be done? If he turned and ran for it, and the Indians came upon his track, and saw that he was flying from them, his fate would be at once sealed; besides, whither could he fly? A second expedient suggested itself, namely, to go on into the mountains, and endeavour, by making a circuit, to avoid the camp he should probably find there. This seemed the best plan, and he determined to adopt it.

The first thing to be done was, to make sure that the people whose smoke he had seen were really Indians. They might just as well be a caravan of travellers, perhaps the very party whose wheel-tracks he had seen earlier in the day, and then he would be sure of finding help. So, carefully soothing the dog, lest Hector should betray him by a loud bark, he walked carefully to the next acclivity, from whence he hoped to obtain a view of the valley. He soon mounted to a good position, and discovered in the valley, on the spot where ten or a dozen columns of smoke were rising into the air, a

number of little round hills, or mounds of earth, with something like round watch-towers between them; and now he saw that he had really approached an Indian village, and that his only chance lay in endeavouring to steal past it silently, and, if possible, unobserved.

With this view, he advanced some way up the mountain, from which, unfortunately, a deep gorge ran at this point into the valley, forming, as it seemed, the bed of a second smaller stream, which emptied itself into the first. Still, the rocky walls were not so steep but that he could have clambered down them.

The forest was here overgrown with a most peculiar kind of bushes, which sent up their branches from the root in a close group, and only diverging a little at the top, almost like a bouquet of flowers bound tightly together. Thickly covered with leaves, and bearing a number of little bluish-red mealy berries on which the light snow lay unmelted, they completely hid his path, and he hoped to reach the valley lower down without being observed by the Indians.

He had been walking on rapidly for some time, and had just gained the level of the camp, when he suddenly observed in the snow traces of the naked feet of some person who had ascended the mountain before him. He was looking in some embarrassment at these tokens, when Hector suddenly set up a furious bark.

He turned round in dismay;—but the next moment showed him that further concealment was vain, and that he was already discovered; for behind him, hardly eighty paces distant, came a great broad-shouldered Indian, who, with a bow and arrow in his right hand, and a quiver in his left, stared upon the boy, quite as much startled to see him there, as George was alarmed on his part to meet an Indian.

In the first movement of surprise, and with an instinctive feeling that he would have to defend himself, George had snatched his gun from his shoulder, and held it pointed at the red-skin. But either the Indian had no hostile intentions, or did not think it advisable to show them ; for, even when the boy made a menacing gesture, he stood still, and called out, with a wave of the hand, and in what appeared to be a tone of greeting, the word " Walleh, walleh ! "

George had not heard the word before; but the friendly gesture of the Indian seemed to explain it as a greeting; and he returned it in the same tone. The red-skin seemed much pleased at this reciprocation of his civility ; for he took the arrow from his bow, put it with the rest in his quiver, and came rapidly towards the young traveller. George put down his rifle, to show the Indian that he intended no violence ; and thus quietly waited the red man's approach. But Hector took quite a different view of the question. Leaping furiously forward, he stationed himself in front of his young master, showed his teeth, and barked so furiously, that the dogs below in the valley heard him, and set up an indignant rejoinder, in full chorus.

Thus threatened by the dog, the Indian stood still, holding his bow in front of him to keep Hector off in case he made a spring. But George, anxious to avoid giving offence to one of the people in whose power he now was, called the dog back, and held him fast by the collar, as he still seemed refractory and indignant.

" Walleh ! " said the Indian again, with a friendly nod, as he came forward with outstretched hand and confident air towards the boy, but with a doubtful look towards surly Hector. " Walleh ! " and he began an animated harangue in his own language, of which George, of course,

understood nothing. He thought probably, from the readiness with which he had returned his greeting, "Walleh," that the boy was well acquainted with the Indian language; and it was not till George shook his head with a smile at all the questions the savage put to him, that the latter began to have a glimmering idea perhaps the one word "Walleh" comprised the whole of the stranger's Californian vocabulary. However, he took the discovery very good-humouredly, and continuing his communications by signs, beckoned the visitor to follow him into the village.

What was George to do? If he refused, and the Indians really felt any hostile disposition towards him, it would be an easy task for them to overtake him and fall upon him in a body; and what could he, a solitary boy, do against the whole tribe? On the other hand, by showing confidence in them, he might perhaps gain their goodwill, and they would certainly be able, if they chose, to give him information about the white men who had lately passed by here. When people really wish to understand each other, signs will go a great way—and that George knew.

So, after a short deliberation, he acceded to the Indian's proposal; and shouldering his rifle, he boldly followed his tawny guide, who seemed well pleased at his ready compliance, into the valley.

CHAPTER III.

HOW GEORGE FARED AMONG THE INDIANS.

As they walked towards the village, George had leisure for a good look at his guide. He was, as we have already said, a tolerably tall, stalwart man, and in general appearance, as in the colour of his skin and hair, he exactly resembled the "red men" of the prairies to the east of the Rocky Mountains. His face was of a dark copper-colour, his hair long, lank, and of raven blackness; he had an aquiline nose, and the expression of his face had in it something that was stately and noble; his eye, in particular, sparkled with life and fire. His costume was very simple, consisting, in fact, entirely of a blue cotton hunting-shirt, falling below the knee. His feet and legs were bare, in spite of the inclemency of the weather; and he had no covering for his head. As an ornament, however, he wore an eagle's feather, fastened to a tuft of hair on the crown of his head; and from the end of this feather a little wand hung down, gaudily decorated with red and white beads. As a further vehicle for ornament, he had pierced the cartilage of his nose, between the nostrils, and passed a short feather through the opening thus made; and he, moreover, wore ear-rings formed of bunches of shells, and fragments of mother-of-pearl.

His chief weapon was a bow, about three feet in length, very prettily and strongly made, and furnished with a stout bowstring. The arrows were of almost the same length as the bow; made of wood, tipped with feathers, and painted red and yellow at the feathered

end. The points were formed by bits of what might look like glass, but was in reality a stone. The quiver for the arrows was made out of prepared skin of a fox, with the bushy tail deep behind as an ornament. Besides this bow, the Indian wore a knife, fastened round his neck by a strap hanging at his breast, but dangling at his back.

George was soon to have a specimen of Indian shooting. They had not proceeded more than a hundred paces along the declivity of the rock before Hector had by this time become reconciled to the Indian's presence, started a squirrel. The little creature jumped from a hazel-bush, and began running along the ground. Although the dog was close behind it, and there were many trees growing near, it did not attempt to run away from one of them, as an English squirrel would at once do, but tried to distance its pursuer like a hare, doubling and turning as it scampered along. He was completely baffled by it two or three times in this way, when it was so nearly overtaken, that he actually made a snap at it, getting a mouthful of snow for his pains. But at last he was close behind it, on a tolerably open space, so that the squirrel was perforce obliged to seek shelter in a tree, from so dangerous and persevering a foe. The dog was, of course, at fault here, and could only stand under the tree, looking from the squirrel to his master, and back again.

But the Indian had already drawn an arrow from his quiver; and when the little fugitive stopped for a moment to look round, he took aim at a distance of twenty paces and sent the arrow whizzing from his bow. It hit the squirrel exactly between the shoulders, so that the poor little creature fell from the tree with the shaft sticking in it. Hector, like a well-taught dog, seized the dead

squirrel and the arrow, which he brought to his master's feet, and there laid them down, to the manifest astonishment and delight of the Indian.

They pursued their way towards the camp, from which George noticed a number of men coming to meet them, and presently they were surrounded by fourteen or fifteen men, exactly like his guide in appearance. Many of these were entirely naked, with the exception of a blanket, which they had bought from some white strangers, and wore as a cloak.

Their behaviour was perfectly friendly. They looked at the boy with eyes of wonder, and kept continually glancing up the valley, as if they expected some of his companions would appear from thence. They could not at all believe that such a young boy would be travelling about by himself.

The camp, or, more properly speaking, the village, consisted of eight or ten great clay huts, raised about six feet above the ground, and sixteen or eighteen feet in diameter. Judging from the appearance of the low entrances, these huts seemed to be built of stakes, with the intervals filled up with boughs or laths, and the whole covered with a thick layer of clay, firmly beaten down, so as to keep out the rain. George saw no hole or chimney to carry off the smoke, which he concluded must be left to make its way out at the door into the open air.

The huts had very much the appearance of giant molehills, beaten smooth, and the upper round roof seemed to be used as a kind of terrace or balcony by the male population, many of whom were quietly squatting on their houses, and smoking their pipes, as George entered the village.

At a short distance from the huts the young visitor

noticed a number of women and children. The ones were quite naked; the women wore a kind of coat of plaited rushes, and nearly all of them blankets like the men. Directly George came enough for the children to see that he was white, scampered off at full speed; and it was very comic to see the tiny naked chaps popping into the entrances of their huts, like so many rabbits scamper into their burrows on the approach of a threat or danger; and to watch how after a time a small face would peer timidly out from their different holes. But if George only turned towards one or other of them, the wild little things disappeared instantly, it was a long time before they showed themselves again with much caution and misgiving.

Many of the young girls, too, crept into their cavernous domiciles as quickly as they could; but a number of women, who were occupied with work that they probably did not like to abandon, remained quietly sitting, or rather crouching, where they happened to be. This particularly attracted George's attention, and he could not refrain from stopping for a moment to watch them.

In front of the huts lay great heaps of acorns which appeared to have been roasted in the fire, and which, he afterwards discovered, had rather an agreeable taste. The women were busy extracting these acorns from their husks, and this they did in a manner at once ingenious and peculiar. Each woman would take up a handful of the acorns in her right hand, put them between her dazzling white teeth, one after another, crack them, and take them from her mouth with her left. In doing so she managed, by a quick turn of the fingers, to extract the kernel from the husk, and then fling the shelled fruit into a mat spread ready to receive it, while

her right hand was carrying another acorn to her mouth for cracking.

The operation went on with great swiftness; and the women seemed particularly careful not to touch the acorns with their lips, so that there was nothing offensive about it.

The buildings George had at first mistaken for watch-towers proved to be a kind of storehouses for the acorns gathered at this season of the year, and which probably form the chief support of the Indians of California during the winter. The buildings were cylinders of strong wickerwork, about ten feet high, and about four feet in diameter. Many of them were already almost half-filled with acorns, and covered in with strips of bark. Standing sometimes separately, sometimes two or even three together, they gave the village a most peculiar appearance.

The Indians, however, did not allow him much time for contemplation; for most of them seemed very desirous to know what had brought the boy among them, and where he had left his companions. George tried to make them understand that there were other white folks up in the mountains, who were in distress, and needed help. But though he described what he wished to say as plainly as he could do by signs, the Indians evidently did not catch his meaning; or perhaps they *would* not understand him. They only shook their heads over and over again, in apparent wonder, and kept up a continual chatter among themselves in their own language. As they spoke, they frequently pointed down towards the valley, and it seemed to George that they meant to show him how some white men had gone in that direction. But glad as he would have been to learn how long since these supposed white folks had passed by, he could get no

answer on the subject from his Indian friends. To all his questions on the subject they only answered by pointing to a particular part of the sky ; and what they meant by this gesture he could not imagine.

Nevertheless, they seemed to have no evil thought against him ; for they had long since laid aside their weapons, and now came up to him, examined his clothes and his rifle, and laughingly pointed out to one another any peculiarity they noticed in their make. Hector, for his part, did not at all approve of what seemed to him an uncalled-for familiarity. Several times he pressed in, growling, between the savages and his young master, and George had several times to pacify his dog as best he could, to prevent Master Hector from making an onslaught on the naked brown legs around him. The Indians seemed somewhat apprehensive of such an attack, for they kept away from the big dog as much as they could ; and the little village curs, who had before barked so violently, eschewed his neighbourhood with wonderful unanimity. Most of them, indeed, had ignominiously fled into the huts with the children, and peered out anxiously from the entrances when the stranger and his dog came their way. But Hector treated them with magnificent contempt.

The Indian who had led George to the village now came suddenly towards him ; for the colloquy that had arisen on his arrival was now ended. George's guide made a long speech, in delivering which he pointed frequently towards the valley, and then towards the sun, now standing high and bright in the heavens. But as George listened to all his eloquence with a look of bewilderment, he at length took the boy's hand, and led him to the other side of the village.

George followed his guide willingly, for he was curious

to know what the Indian would do. The meaning of the whole oration appeared, however, to be simply an invitation to breakfast; for here he found other women busily employed in the preparation of their rather peculiar repast.

He observed generally that all the work fell to the share of the female part of the community. Not one of the men seemed to be employed about anything useful. Either they were lounging about, with their hands folded before them, through the village, or else they lay stretched at full length on mats, or on the roofs of their houses, basking in the rays of the sun. The women, on the contrary, were one and all busy: some were cracking acorns, others preparing the breakfast; while others, again, came from the wood, bringing flat baskets filled with a kind of grass-flower or seed, which they had managed to find and collect, in spite of the snow. This seed was prepared by the help of fire, in a very ingenious way. As they possessed no iron vessels, they left the seed in the flat baskets, and threw little hot pieces of charred wood among the mass, which they kept shaking to and fro till the wood had cooled.

Their mode of cooking, too, was very peculiar. George soon noticed, on the ground, sundry little round holes filled with a kind of broth, of a greenish-yellow colour. Around these holes a number of women were at work; and they seemed particularly anxious that the dog should not approach the scene of their labours. They called out to the men in a loud and anxious voice, whereupon the Indians pointed to Hector, and shook their heads most energetically. Hector had certainly showed a great inclination to investigate the holes, which he seemed to think contained something particularly nice. So, in order to avoid any cause of complaint, George took him by the

collar, to which he tied a stout string, and thus kept his follower in secure custody. The women appeared fully satisfied with this arrangement, and nodded in a friendly way to the visitor, who, for his part, stood still in astonishment, watching their proceedings. The way in which they carried on their culinary operations was quite new to him, and amused him extremely.

At a place where the rocky ledge sloped gradually down, the natives had hollowed out a number of cavities, most probably by continual use. Into these they thrust little heaps of dried acorns, and beat and bruised them with stones, prepared for the purpose, till the acorns were reduced to the consistency of fine yellow flour. This flour was transferred to the before-mentioned holes in the ground, whose inside surface had been polished and made quite water-tight; and here it was boiled like broth or porridge.

"But," I hear my readers remark, "you cannot light a fire *under a hole in the ground!*" Perfectly true, dear young friends; but the Indians managed this business in a very clever way. One may well say that necessity is the mother of invention; that is to say, that she compels man to find out all kinds of ingenious devices—devices which but for this troublesome necessity he would never have hit upon—to secure what he requires for sustenance and comfort, in the speediest and readiest manner possible.

The Indians could not, as you say, light a fire under the hole in the ground. They had no pots or vessels that would bear the action of fire, and did not know how to manufacture them; but they had kindled great wood fires close beside the cooking-holes; and in these fires they heated a number of stones, of different sizes, till they were red-hot. As soon as the requisite amount of heat

had been obtained, the women withdrew these stones very cleverly from the fire by means of two short sticks, which they used by way of tongs; then the stones were immersed for a moment in water, in a basket so beautifully plaited that not a drop ran out; and finally they were carefully deposited in the holes among the acorn porridge, which they heated so thoroughly, that in the course of a few minutes it was bubbling up merrily.

When the food was ready, it was ladled out, by means of a kind of wooden shovel, into water-tight baskets, like the one already mentioned, but a little smaller in size; and then it was considered ready for use.

A basket of this description was given to George; and as he feared to offend the people by refusing a repast thus hospitably offered, he accepted the basket gratefully, and looked round for a spoon. Very naturally he did not know how such a soup could be eaten in any other way. At first the Indians could not imagine what he meant, till he at length made them understand that he did not know how to get the soup out of the basket. That seemed to amuse them mightily; they laughed violently at his dilemma; and then his guide, who seemed to have taken quite a fancy to the white boy, beckoned to him to engage his attention.

Then he took one of the baskets, and, making a kind of cup of his fingers, dipped them deeply into the hot mass, and thrust them into his mouth. When the fingers reappeared, they had been licked perfectly clean; and the Indian repeated this elegant operation until he had more than half emptied his basket of porridge.

The women, who had hitherto kept somewhat in the background, now came crowding up; and several of them, touching George's arm with a friendly smile, pointed to the baskets, and made signs that he should imitate his

guide. But George could not make up his mind to this. He shook his head, and, lifting the basket to his lips, drank the thin porridge, which tasted rather bitter, but not otherwise unpalatable. The Indians shouted with laughter at what appeared to them a most eccentric proceeding.

By this time the savages had become quite confidential with George. When the meal was finished, and the women and children had cleared out the portion left in the vessels for their share, after the men had eaten enough, they invited him to look at the inside of one of their huts.

George did not quite approve of this proceeding, for he could not well take his long gun with him through the narrow entrance, and still he did not like the thought of leaving it outside; for suppose the Indians were to take it away, and refuse to give it up, to whom should he look for its restoration; and, indeed, what should he do, alone and unarmed in the woods? But he was obliged to console himself with the thought, that if the natives had intended mischief, they would probably have shown their hostile disposition long before; and besides, he could leave Hector behind as a guard over his gun; so, depositing the rifle at the entrance of a hut, he called to Hector to lie down beside it. And the dog seemed to understand him perfectly: he took up his station with the gravity of a veteran sentinel, and looked at the gun with an expression which said plainly, "Touch it if you dare."

When George stepped *down* into the hut, for he found that it was built considerably below the level of the surrounding ground, he had to pause for a time, until his eyes became accustomed to the gloom and the thick stifling smoke. When he could manage to distinguish

objects round him, he found himself standing in a room about seven feet high at the walls, and eight towards the centre, where a wood fire was smouldering. A litter of rushes and reeds was strewn along one side, and was used, no doubt, as a bed by the whole family. A troop of little naked children were now cowering upon it, and looked wildly and timidly at the intruder, pressing as close to the wall as they could; and two little dogs, of something like the Esquimaux breed, retired from him, growling, as far as the wall would allow. The framework of the hut was made of tolerably strong timber, for it had to bear no small weight in the superincumbent earth; and this earth was kept from crumbling into the hut by a layer of branches, closely plaited together.

Beyond a couple of the usual baskets, George could see nothing like household utensils; furniture, such as table, chairs, and chests, was of course out of the question. People like the Californian Indians have a habit of wearing their whole wardrobe at once; and when their garments will hang upon them no longer, they either purchase new ones, or go without.

The atmosphere in the hut was foul and oppressive in the extreme, and heartily glad was George to find himself once more in the open air.

Hector also seemed greatly rejoiced to see his young master reappear. He jumped about him, and barked so gleefully, that all the little curs in the place came running up and yelled in chorus; but still they kept at a respectful distance from the great strange dog. The gun, to George's great delight, was leaning against the wall of the hut, exactly where he had left it. He now felt anxious to get away from the village, for the Indians, who had neither horses, mules, nor oxen, could render him no assistance; so he again endeavoured to make

them understand what he wanted; and his guide, after again consulting with the rest, and pointing to the sun, suddenly seized his bow and arrows, and beckoned George to follow him.

"Whither?"—The Indian pointed down the valley, and from the signs he made, George concluded that he was going to show him the way to some place where he would find a waggon and white men.

He shouldered his rifle with right goodwill. It could not be far off, he imagined, or the Indian would not have been so ready to go with him; so he took a hearty farewell of his new friends, each of whom he shook by the hand; even the women came up, and nodded repeatedly to him; they had never seen so young a "white man" in the woods alone before.

In leaving the village he had another opportunity of admiring the wealth of the tribe in fruit, and their care in storing up provisions; for in one place he saw waggon-loads of hazel-nuts piled up in heaps, and in another a great collection of all kind of berries, from which, as he afterwards learned, the Indians prepare a kind of drink.

Directly he had quitted the village, the little native curs regained courage, and ran after him, barking and yelling and making a horrible din. But on Hector's turning indignantly round, they clapped their tails between their legs, and ran back, with the utmost despatch, towards the protection of their homes. Hector did not even deign to growl; he looked after them for a moment with sovereign contempt, and then turned and followed his master.

And are they not true types of certain classes of men? Do not those who have the smallest stock of true courage always speak in the most valorous tones, as soon as the

danger is over, or they are beyond its reach? Whoever will but encounter them boldly, is sure to scare them away. "Dogs that bark, don't bite," says the proverb; and men who are best at talking, are generally the most miserable doers on the face of creation.

CHAPTER IV.

HOW GEORGE FARED AMONG THE WHITE MEN—THE GIGANTIC
DEER.

THE Indian strode on sturdily down the valley, which became broader and broader the further they went. The sun shone out so warmly, that the snow melted rapidly beneath its enlivening beams, and here and there the green earth began to peer through. The forest, too, began to assume a grander character, and pines and red-wood trees, thick with green foliage, reared their mighty trunks to gigantic height. The yew grew here, too, in abundance, with its bright green needle-leaves, and its beautiful red berries; and where the tree-stems rose so loftily and sturdily, and with their intertwining boughs formed a complete roof or screen, the tiresome under-wood could not grow so luxuriantly—so that the travellers had comparatively an easy time of it, and could get on rapidly.

Here and there they could cut off a corner where the stream's course was more than usually devious; and once they crossed the water on a fallen stem, that lay across it from bank to bank. They had thus proceeded

for an hour or more, when the Indian suddenly stopped, and pointed down into the valley. At first George could not conceive what he meant, as he followed the direction of the Indian's finger with his eyes. At length he descried something white gleaming through the bushes, which did not appear to be snow, and looking more intently, found, to his great delight, that it was a little caravan of emigrants, comprising two waggons.

With a shout of joy he hurried on; he had already recognized in the people old companions of the road, who had travelled part of the way across the steppes with his parents, but had at last outstripped them, through having better oxen. He saw too, at a glance, what had detained them in this valley; for an old broken wheel was lying by the stream, which they had crossed here; and the men were employed in fitting a new one, they had hastily fashioned in a rough but sturdy way, on the axle.

Though not a sworn mechanic, the American backwoodsman is particularly handy at all kinds of carpenter's and smith's work; and he handles the axe with uncommon dexterity.

But if George, on his part, was overjoyed to meet his old acquaintance, of whose assistance he stood in such great need, they, on the other hand, seemed to be rather sorry to see him than otherwise.

"Hallo, George," cried one, as the boy ran eagerly up to him—and he never even looked up from his work as he spoke; "have *you* got here already? There now, I knew how it would be. That rascally wheel has kept us here such a time that we've lost the few miles we'd managed, by dint of hard work, to gain upon you. Plague on the whole country, with its rocks and stones and pitfalls."

"No, Mr. Hoslick," answered George; "*we've* not al of us got here yet. Father's up yonder in the mountains, and has sent me on, to get some one or other to help him. All our oxen are dead but one; and he's not strong enough to drag the waggon alone—and mother's ill, and so she can't walk through the snow."

"Well," said the man, "then you're in a pretty fix, I guess. Yes, the overland route has done many a fellow up, before now. And just see what time *we've* lost too. Why, we ought to be up to our ancles in gold, by this time,—and here we're sitting in this abominable place, where one can't get out either one way or the other, it seems to me. Well, this new wheel will last to our journey's end. I only hope another won't go breaking and upsetting all our plans again."

"It looks strong enough," observed George; "but could you be kind enough to lend us a couple of your oxen, Mr. Hoslick—just to help father, and mother, and little sister out of the snow, up yonder?"

"Who—I—I—to send a couple of my oxen up yonder into the snow?" cried the American turning round and staring in wonder at the lad's anxious face. "Why, that would be a pretty thing to do. You must be mad, boy, or else you must think that I am. I'm just thanking my lucky stars that I've got so far—and I *must* be stark staring demented to go sending back for every one who may have stuck fast in the mountains."

"But do you mean to say," remonstrated George, trying hard to keep down a choking feeling in his throat and an indignant tear that started to his eye; "do you mean to say that you'd let a family perish up there, not a day's march from this place, when you've got it in your power to help them all?"

"Help—help—" grumbled the man, hammering away

angrily at his work. "I thought you knew the old saying—'Help yourself.' Every man must get on as best he can, and people who can't go through with a journey like this, have no right to undertake it. Do you fancy," he continued, turning round moodily to the lad, "that your father would have stopped to help me mend my wheel, if we had been here together now, eh?"

"Certainly he would," replied George quickly; "he has helped many people before now, and I know he would not have left you in the lurch."

"Oh! he'd have wasted his time here along o' me."

"Yes, that he would."

"Then he'd be a greater fool than I've ever taken him for till now," grumbled the man; and he hammered the linchpin into the axle, to which he had just fastened the new wheel.

Two of the women belonging to the caravan had come up, and stood listening to their conversation.

"But, father," said one of them,—a young girl, with a frank, open countenance,—“you surely can't let the Oakleys stay up yonder in such trouble, while you go quietly on. Suppose you sent back John to them, with a couple of oxen. The road, you see, is much better down here; and we could get on well enough with the rest.”

"Just please to attend to your own concerns," answered her father, in a tone that made the poor girl hang her head, and step nervously back; "how am I to get them back, pray, if we go on in the mean time? And the oxen, too, that have cost me a lot of money, they'll be sure to be ruined, if they've to go over the whole of that rascally road again, and feel a strange whip into the bargain."

"But I meant, if we were to wait here for them," shily suggested the young maiden.

"Very fine, indeed; and down at the mines people are earning from one to two ounces a day, each man; and there are five of us up here, all hearty strong fellows. Who's to pay us for the time we shall waste, eh? You youngsters are always ready to talk, and can't see an inch beyond your own little noses. And then, when you've got yourself into a fix, I guess it's always the old daddy who's got to help you out of it. And, thanks be, he knows what's what a little better than you do. So, the long and short of it is, that I don't send my oxen back into the mountains. I wouldn't do it for my own brother, if he'd stuck fast up there—that is, unless he paid me for it, and handsomely too."

"My father will be glad to pay you whatever is right—as much as ever he can afford," cried George, hastily.

"Yes, yes, we know all about that," retorted the man with a doubtful shake of his head; "as much as he can afford—and whatever is right. But what is right in California?—that's the point. Prices here are not the same as in the States; and in the papers at home I've read that it's easy to get five or six ounces a day for the hire of a couple of oxen. Suppose I were to come to your father, and ask him to come down with a hundred dollars for the two days. He'd make a fine fuss about it, I reckon; and he'd publish me all through California as a cheat and an extortioner. Besides, I don't believe that he has so much money left, for he was uncommonly put to it, I know, before he left the States. He had to sell everything to fit himself out for the journey."

George stood disconsolately by the waggon, and looked in great perplexity at the hard-hearted proprietor. What was he to do now? To go further into the country, or to sneak back to his parents, without bringing them any

his hand to her, "I've had my breakfast ; but I'm obliged to you for your good word with your father."

"Ah, you're very angry with my father, I'm afraid," said Jenny, looking beseechingly at him, with her eyes full of tears.

"No, Jenny," replied George chivalrously, feeling how much it would have hurt her if he had answered "yes;" "he has a right to do as he likes, and no one can force him to lend his oxen or his horse."

"Father is not at all hard-hearted at other times," cried the daughter, eagerly defending him; "only these last days he's been dreadfully annoyed at our having to wait here so long—and where are you going now, George?"

"Heaven knows!" answered the boy, turning away with a sigh. "Good bye, Jenny! I must see and get help somewhere else."

He shouldered his gun, and while the young girl looked mournfully after him, willing but not able to assist, he had almost mechanically mounted the acclivity which he had descended, scarcely knowing why he did so.

The Indian had been present at the whole conference, though he had not approached the waggon; with the native acuteness of his race he had, however, obtained some notion of the point in dispute, though he could not understand a word of what was said. The boy did not think any more about the Indian; for how could he expect the Indian to help him—though, indeed, the red men had done for him in his need more than his own white countrymen would do; but hearing the Indian's footsteps behind him, he stopped to await his approach.

"Eh?" asked the savage, shaking his head as he pointed down towards the waggon.

George replied by a similar movement.

The Indian gave a grunt, and stood for a time looking thoughtfully down on the ground. He gave another glance at the waggon, to which the oxen were being harnessed, and then looked back at the boy, as if he had something to say; then suddenly appearing to have made up his mind, he went up to George, gave him a friendly tap on the arm, and beckoning him to follow, began climbing the mountain with rapid steps, entirely quitting the valley.

George hardly knew whether it would be more prudent to follow or to remain; but the Indian had hitherto shown himself in every way so friendly, and now seemed so desirous of assisting him, that a short deliberation decided him to follow. His leader was already some distance in advance; and when, on turning round, he saw the young white following, he beckoned him with his hand to come on, and continued his march without taking any further notice of the lad.

They had proceeded thus far for about three hours, and had come to a part of the higher land where the snow lay thickly on the ground. But the red-skin tramped through it with his naked legs in the most indifferent manner, and only stopped, when he had reached the summit of a hill, to wait for his young companion.

This way now led them again towards the valley; and from the mountain, whence they could overlook the lower land, it appeared to George as if the ridges gradually sloped in that direction toward a region generally more depressed. In that case, the waggons coming across the mountains would have had a much better chance by keeping towards that part, and would certainly have sooner come upon a smooth road than in following the course of the other river.

George had not, however, much time for reflections of that sort. He was obliged to give his whole attention to observing the road on which he travelled, so that, when his leader left him, he should be able to find his way back alone without going astray.

A little attention will enable a man possessed of an average organ of locality, if not to find his way back through a strange region, at least to remember the direction in which he came; but if, trusting to an experienced leader, he neglects to use his own powers of observation, he is almost certain to lose himself, for every object he has passed will appear new and strange to him.

The wood seemed to abound in game. In the higher parts especially, they came upon many fresh traces of red deer in the snow; but George never thought of following them up.

Thus they descended the slope, following its direction downwards, but always bearing a little towards the left. So long as they kept towards the north, the wood looked bleak and wintry enough; but scarcely had they, turning due west, reached the extremity of the mountain ridge, when they suddenly touched the snow limit, and all at once entered upon a country of an entirely different aspect. Wherever the trees grew a little more sparingly, the ground was covered with the loveliest flowers; and the grass grew here in wonderful luxuriance. The valley before them seemed, moreover, at least four times as broad as that of the last mountain stream they had passed, and George felt confident that they would find here the first colony of white people. Still there appeared not a single trace of civilization, not a sign of the activity of a human hand. Nowhere did a fallen tree betray the proximity of white men, and there were no footmarks

in the road, save those of the wild animals of the forest.

The Indian now marched at his young companion's side. There was no chance of a conference between them, ignorant as each was of the language of the other; and, moreover, each seemed fully occupied with his own thoughts. Suddenly George felt the hand of the Indian laid heavily upon his arm; and turning round in surprise, he noticed that his leader was not looking at him, but gazing fixedly down the incline, and pointing stealthily with his bow at some object.

George looked in the direction indicated, and at once became aware of some large body moving slowly to and fro,—but he could not immediately make out what it was.

The animal, whatever it might be, was standing in a little thicket of the trees bearing red berries, and its head was evidently depressed towards the ground. A moment afterwards it suddenly started up, and, with a beating heart, George beheld the mighty antlers of an elk, or giant stag, which was feeding at its ease, totally unconscious of danger. The head of the deer was turned from them; but George could see by the stately horns, whose whole extent was displayed to the best advantage, that the stag was an exceedingly large one.

If he succeeded in killing the creature, he could do nothing with it but cut off as much of the flesh as they wanted for provisions. But in the glow of his hunter's zeal he never thought of this. He had never in his life shot an elk, though he had seen several in the eastern prairies; and he burned with impatience to prove his prowess upon this lord of the forest.

Brought up in the woods, and well used to hunting, he was too cautious to run too hastily towards his prey.

On the contrary, he began by carefully ascertaining the direction of the wind ; for with the breeze blowing from the hunter towards the deer, it is impossible to creep up to the creature unobserved. All wild animals of the forest have a remarkably keen sense of smell, and scent everything that is strange and inimical to them at long distances. But they can, of course, not be aware of anything that approaches them from the windward, or *towards* which the wind blows *from* them ; and therefore it is important to a hunter who wants to creep up to a deer, to get "the wind" of him, or, in other words, to take up such a position that the wind blows directly in his face, and not from him towards the deer.

The light breeze was favourable to the young marksman. The sun shone down somewhat hotly upon the forest, and the warm current of air kept rising upwards. Carefully keeping a thick tree between himself and the deer, so that his intended victim might not get sight of him, George beckoned to the Indian to stay where he was, and threw down his cap, as a sign to Hector that he should watch this piece of property until his master returned.

Hector at once obeyed the well-known command ; but the Indian was not to be restrained so easily. He either doubted the youngster's ability to get near enough to the stag without being observed, or the ardour of the chase excited him too much to allow of his staying behind ; at any rate, he followed close upon the boy's footsteps, keeping his bow bent and his arrow pointed at the stag, though he could hardly hope to wound the great creature effectually with such a weapon. If he doubted George's woodcraft, he did him wrong ; for the boy knew perfectly well how to set about approaching his prey. He craftily took advantage of every tree,

bush, or stone, that offered itself as a screen, behind which he could creep nearer and nearer towards the unsuspecting deer. Nor did he neglect to pay particular attention to the state of the ground he had to traverse. This is a point of great importance, for a moment's inattention may cause the foot to be placed upon a withered branch, which immediately breaks with a cracking noise. The wild animals of the wood listen very sharply for such sounds, and are more alarmed by them than even by loud shouts and cries.

As for the Indian, he followed in such complete silence, that George only became aware of his presence through turning his head by chance to see where his leader might be. The red-skin grinned in delighted glee to see how warily the young white stole upon the traces of the deer. Thus, with consummate caution, they had advanced to within a hundred paces of the elk, which, in its search for the juiciest grass, had now emerged completely from the little thicket, without at all seeming to suspect that enemies were near. It became impossible now to follow the creature any further, for the wood opened and formed a little natural meadow, formed perhaps by some fire in the forest years and years ago. George was now near enough to make his grand effort; and when the stag raised his head again, and looked round, he lifted his rifle, leaned the barrel against the trunk of the nearest tree, took a long and deliberate aim, and fired.

CHAPTER V.

TELLS WHOM GEORGE FOUND IN THE WOOD, AND HOW HE WAS
RECEIVED.

ALMOST at the same instant that the report of his gun rang through the wood, the little marksman heard the *thug* of the bullet as it struck the deer. The stag struck out with one of his hind legs, turned sharply round, and fled in blind haste down the incline. The Indian, who had followed him with his eyes as long as he could see him, now began to dance and jump about, shouting and whooping with joy till the air resounded with the uproar.

George looked round at him in surprise, and shook his head laughingly at the red fellow's queer antics. He felt sure, however, that he had hit the stag; and the next thing to be done was to fetch the dog, and with his assistance to follow the traces of the wounded creature.

The first trouble was saved him; for Hector, though in general unimpeachably obedient in remaining on guard where he had been posted, had been confused or had his curiosity strongly excited by the savage's shouts; and suddenly he appeared, wagging his tail in a jaunty but somewhat doubtful style, and holding his young master's cap in his mouth: thus he stood, about twenty yards off, evidently rather anxious in his mind as to the reception he should meet with.

George was much too gleeful at his success to give the dog a hard word; for a moment he had even forgotten in his excitement the urgent cause that had brought him

into the wood. His only thought was to find the stag, and to obtain the certainty that he had really, with his own hand, slain the mighty creature; so, whistling to Hector, who came bounding up joyfully, he took his cap from that faithful quadruped, and then ran towards the place where the stag had stood when he shot him, followed by his human and canine companions.

They found a pool of blood, and a bunch of hairs, cut off short by the bullet; both proofs that the deer had been mortally wounded. Hector at once found out the spot; and after running to and fro for a few moments he ran off on the stag's trail.

Now, it is a rule among hunters, that a wounded deer is not to be followed at once, but to have time given it, that the wound it has received may kill it. A deer, too quickly disturbed, has often strength enough to jump up and run a considerable distance. But if it is left alone, it remains lying where it has once sunk down, and dies there.

But George was much too impatient to wait long; and, besides, Hector was such a capital dog, that he could certainly be depended upon, if the worst came to the worst. If the stag had jumped up again, Hector would soon have overtaken and pulled him down.

They had not far to seek. Scarcely two hundred yards from where the stag had been shot Hector suddenly sprang aside into a bush, and by his loud barking announced the presence of the deer. Before George could run up to the spot, an old man stepped suddenly from behind the stem of a tall pine-tree, and came forward, looking at the youngster with a gloomy, menacing scowl.

He wore the usual American hunting dress, — a leathern frock, long leggings fringed at the side, and a

fur cap,—and he carried a long American rifle. He stood still, leaning on his gun, about ten paces from the dead stag, and cried roughly,—

“Wal! and where do *you* come from, ye young skip-jack? It's you that shot that deer, is it? Is that the way ye go shooting down the game, before a man's face that's been looking after it for an hour or more; robbing him of his rights, eh?”

“How was I to know that you were there?” retorted George, rather disturbed at this angry address. “I got a chance at the deer, and thought I'd as much right to a shot at him as any one else. But if you like” he added, good-humouredly, “we'll go shares in him; or you may have him altogether, if you'll only give us a bit to cook.”

“Don't want half of him, nor the whole of him,” grumbled the man. “Won't have him at all as a present. When I want a deer, I reckon I can shoot one myself. But what are you doing here with that red-skin? What right has a brat like you to be running about alone in the woods?”

George felt the sarcasm contained in this surly man's words. But before he could make any reply, his Indian guide went up to the old fellow, and, undismayed by his grumpy look, seized his hand, which he shook heartily, and began to pour out a long story in his own language.

The old man seemed to be only half listening to him, and kept looking at the boy, with anything but a friendly glance. Still, he seemed to understand what the savage was saying, for he did not interrupt him; and it was only when the Indian had finished his speech that the old backwoodsman turned again to George.

“What sort of a queer tale's this?” he asked. “*Who* is it that's stuck fast yonder, in the mountains; and

how came you to be wandering about here, looking for whites, when ye ought to be at home looking after your book in school? I can't make head or tail of that fellow's jargon."

The recollection of his errand fell like a stone on George's heart. In his triumph at having killed the deer, he had for a moment quite forgotten his poor parents. With hurried words, and as briefly as possible, he told the old man what had brought him thither, and how, after applying in vain to his own countrymen in the valley, he had followed the Indian he hardly knew whither.

"Well, the red-skin told me that," grumbled his questioner. "He told me he was leading you to me. I live not far from here, but what I'm to do to help ye, I don't know; and I don't see why I should put myself out. What's your name?"

"Oakley—George Oakley."

"Oakley!" repeated the old man, with a sharp glance of inquiry at the boy. "But there are a good many of that name," he added. "Where do you come from?"

"From the States."

"I know that; but from what part?"

"From Arkansas—Perry County, on the Arkansas river."

"And what's your father's name—George too?"

"No, John. Do you know him?"

"I! how should I know him?" retorted the old man, turning gloomily away. "Never been at the Arkansas river in my life, and don't want to go. But now let's see, first of all, what kind of a deer you've shot; we can talk about the rest afterwards. Your father will just have to get out of the scrape by himself, for I don't think he'll find any one in this country flat enough to

lend him his beasts. I haven't got any myself, thanks be——"

"You haven't any cattle?" cried George, in alarm.

"What should I do with cattle?" grumbled the hunter; "I live here in the woods by myself, and don't care for any man, much less for beasts. Thunder! but that's a brave stag."

The exclamation was called forth by the sight of the dead deer, by whose carcass Hector was still keeping watch, and to which the man sauntered without caring to look if either of the others followed him. He put out his hand to take the creature by the horns and lift up its head; but Hector, who seemed highly to resent the liberty, started up growling, sprang towards the startled interloper, and stood between the old man and the stag, snarling and showing his teeth.

"Tarnation brute!" cried the American, whose temper this incident did not tend to improve; "I suppose he won't be content without he tears the clothes off my back. Call him off, confound ye!"

"Hector, come here," cried George. "Down, dog, down; for shame, old fellow, don't you know friends when you see them?"

"Fine friends," growled the American, with a suspicious look at the snarling Hector; "friends like dog and cat, I reckon. That's a big stag, though, and if we had him down yonder among the diggers, we could realize a good sum on him; up here he ain't worth carrying away."

It was really a very large elk,—about as big as an average horse, and with an enormous pair of antlers. It must have weighed above six hundredweight. They had all three to take hold of him merely to turn him on

the other side ; for hunters always like to see where their bullet has struck. It is a strange circumstance that a deer generally falls on the side on which the bullet has hit him, so that he lies down on the wound. Perhaps this is because the wound burns, and the creature thinks to cool it by pressing it against the earth. Thus it lies bleeding till it dies.

"Hum ! that bullet's well fired in," observed the old man, pointing to the little bullet-hole just behind the shoulder-blade ; "and your rifle must be a good one, or the beast would have run a good bit with such a little ball in him as that : most likely hit him right in the heart ; just a chance shot, I reckon."

"No chance shot at all, sir," replied George, rather hurt at the doubt of his skill this view implied ; "I know how to hit where I aim."

"Eh, eh !" cried his tormentor, with a malicious grin, "you're a great hunter already, I've no doubt,—it's easy to see that ; the boy hasn't even reloaded since he fired his gun off, half an hour ago."

George blushed fiery red. The old man with the jeering, disagreeable laugh was right ; he had quite forgotten, in his glee at the lucky shot, to reload his rifle, which he ought to have done long ago. Ashamed at his own negligence, he took out the ramrod, screwed the sponge on the end, wiped out the barrel of his gun, and reloaded it.

His new acquaintance meanwhile proceeded, with the help of the Indian, to dismember the stag. The boy's bullet had really traversed the heart, and had buried itself in the flesh between two of the ribs on the right side. The operation was soon concluded ; and Hector was not forgotten, being gratified with a great peace of meat, which he devoured with manifest relish. Then

the old man, totally regardless of the skin, cut off one of the haunches, which he gave to the Indian to carry, and loading himself with a piece of the loin and the liver, he took up his rifle, and said to George,—

“Come, then, we’ll go home and have something to eat, for I mustn’t send ye away hungry. Then you can take as much of the meat as you like, and I’ll carry the rest into my house.”

“And is there no other white man near here,” asked George despondingly, “from whom I could get help for my poor father and mother?”

“No one that I know of,” replied the American drily; “but we’ll talk of that when we get home;” and without paying any further attention to the boy, he turned away, spoke a few words to the Indian, shouldered his rifle, and walked quickly towards the valley.

George did not know what to make of this rough character, but there was nothing for it but to follow him; besides, his march had made him very hungry, and if he were to light a fire on the spot he would lose time; though, indeed, on the other hand, the old hermit had already told him, in sufficiently hard words, that he would not help him. Still the lad could not help thinking that perhaps the old bear was more good-natured than he pretended to be, and might be persuaded to do something for him after all.

While he was debating this point within himself, they were descending rapidly into the valley, in which George now descried from afar a little block hut, built roughly enough of slender unbarked pine-stems. What interested him far more, however, was a brown pony and another animal, which he at first took for a foal, but which proved on a nearer approach to be a brown donkey of very respectable size. These two creatures were grazing in the

neighbourhood of the hut, and as soon as their master approached and whistled to them, they came running towards him at the top of their speed.

There was no door to the house. Near the centre of the aperture which did duty instead, two poles had been fastened diagonally, probably to prevent the pony and his long-eared confederate from taking advantage of their master's absence to visit the interior. Asses are very fond of creeping in wherever they can get through, and stealing everything they can find at all fit to eat.

The interior of the little building into which they now stepped was bare enough, and at the first glance a stranger would hardly have thought it was inhabited. Furniture was absent altogether. In one corner lay rolled up a couple of blankets, with a saddle and a couple of raw deer-skins laid one above the other, probably to serve as a bed for the proprietor. There was, besides, a long-handled frying-pan by the hearth, in company with a tin pot and a sort of coffee-machine; in the opposite corner, depended from pegs driven into the wall a great Spanish pack-saddle, and a couple of little leathern sacks, one of which evidently contained meal: the hearth had not even a chimney above it.

The above were the whole contents of the little dwelling, for there were no more traces of chairs and tables than if the little blockhouse had been an Indian hut.

The proprietor now set about his duties as host. He hung the meat they had brought with them over the little fireplace, threw dry faggots on the glowing ashes of a fire that smouldered there, sent the Indian with the tin pan to bring water, and had soon a capital meal cooking by the fire.

George could not help admiring the quiet, handy way in which the old man set about all his preparations.

Not a word did he speak during the whole time—but when the coffee boiled, and the meat was roasted, and a kind of dough-cake had attained its proper consistency, he took the whole paraphernalia out into the sunshine in front of the hut, and summoned his two guests to follow him.

Here George found that the stump of a tree was to do duty as a table. The three men sat down on the ground around it, took out their hunting-knives, and were soon actively employed in discussing the well-cooked meal. The Indian ate heartily, but refused the coffee. At first, when the old American handed him the tin mug, out of which they all had to drink in turn, he showed an evident intention of dipping his fingers in, as if he had been eating his native acorn-broth—but his host abruptly prevented him.

“Just look at the dirty fellow,” he exclaimed, snatching the goblet hastily away; “if he ain’t going to wash his dirty paws in our good coffee. No, my lad, that won’t do here. If you can’t drink like a Christian, why, I guess you’ll just have to go thirsty like a heathen.”

He tried to show the savage how the mug was to be used, and the red man understood him quickly enough. But as often as he raised the mug to his lips, and felt the hot steam rising up into his face, he put it down again in alarm, and could not be persuaded to drink like his two white friends—and, consequently, he had to go without coffee.

During the meal, another guest appeared, in the person of the brown donkey, who had, however, first to sustain a little combat against Hector. That intelligent dog seemed to think it exceedingly unbecoming, that an ass should be received at the dinner-table, and was bent on

denying him admittance. Master Longear was greatly scandalized at this behaviour; and, after braying his disapprobation, he suddenly turned round, and kicked out at the dog so vigorously and cleverly, that his enemy had nothing for it but to retreat step by step.

The old man watched the battle, with a quiet look of humour about his mouth, till the donkey had achieved what seemed to be his usual place—at his master's side. Then he patted him on the neck, and said approvingly—

“That's right, Musquito, don't you stand any nonsense, old boy; we're at home here, and can do as we like.”

And he proceeded to feed his four-footed dependant with sundry pieces of cake, which he threw over his shoulder to Musquito, who ate them with manifest relish. But, whenever the dog approached him, he put back his long ears, curled his upper lip, and looked as malignant as a donkey can.

“Now, my lad,” said the host, when they had done eating, “now we've had our prog, we'll talk of business, for I only seem half to understand your rigmarole. So far as I can make out, you say that your father and mother, and your poor little wench of a sister, are up among the mountains somewhere, in the snow, with an ox who's half dead; and, consequently, they can't get along—and so you're come down to look out for some one or other good-natured or soft enough to help you out of the scrape—that's about it, eh?”

“Yes,” answered George, not particularly pleased at the light in which the matter was put.

“And what the tarnal can have set your father on to marching across these horrible mountains with a wife, and a little child, eh? Didn't he know what the poor things would have to bear, in the way of danger, and

cold and hunger, in a journey like that? Isn't it a burning shame, that people should risk everything, even to their wives and children, for the sake of the red gold; and wouldn't they deserve to be put in prison, if they didn't deserve the madhouse still more?"

"My father *didn't* come to California after the gold," retorted George boldly; "and a man can't be fonder of his wife and children than he is of us all."

"Well, he's got a rum way of showing it,—taking them on a journey like that," muttered the old man to himself; "defend us from such love as that! But, if you didn't come for the gold, why *did* you come? You don't tell me that such a journey was begun without some reason?"

"No, I don't mean to say that," replied George, whose face was glowing with indignation at the thought of a slur cast upon his father. "Father worked at home as hard as any man can from morning till night; and he'd got his little farm into better order in the last three years than any one in the whole district. There isn't a bit of stump left in any of our fields; and we've reclaimed twenty acres of forest, close to the Arkansas, within three years, father and I alone. But last year the Arkansas river rose higher than any one remembered to have seen it before. Our flocks were swept away, and our houses torn to the ground, and carried off, with everything we possessed, by the foaming waters. We only just managed to escape with our lives down the river, in a little boat to the Fourche la Pave hills. Still, we might have got over all that, for we were all of us healthy, and able and willing to work. But when the water fell again, and we went back to our farm, we found every foot of the land we had reclaimed, and a much greater space still, far away into the wood, covered with

sand. There lay the white river sand, above a foot deep, over the whole farm ; and in some places we dug three or four feet deep before we came to the land. There was no chance of clearing it away, for it would have cost us thousands of dollars,—and all the trouble and labour we had bestowed on the farm was lost,—and all our money, too.”

“Well, that’s a bad job, certainly,” observed the old hunter ; “but you had land close to you as good as the fields you had lost, and in three years you might have had as good a farm in another place. People who give it up at the first cross accident, won’t do much good in the world.”

“Who told you that we gave it up ? ” retorted George ; “father and I would have set to work again there, as we intend to do here ; but just in the heavy time there came news to us that my grandfather, my mother’s father, was living in California, and had sent for an old friend to come to him.”

“Ah ! ” said the old man, “then your grandad invited you to come and visit him ? ”

“Why, no,” answered George, rather reluctantly, after a moment’s pause, “grandfather is angry with us ; why I can’t tell, but, at any rate, he would never take any notice of us. It wasn’t to us that he sent the news, but to his friend, who had died, however, before it arrived.”

“I see, I see,” said the old man, with a chuckle ; “I understand you now. So you packed up your traps, and intend to come down upon the old fellow. You think, if once you’re there, he will be obliged to come round and make friends, or, at any rate, to help you out of the mess.”

“I don’t see why you should think so harshly of every-

body," exclaimed George, with some warmth; "neither father nor I want anything from the old gentleman, and we wouldn't accept any help that was not given willingly. We can get on by ourselves, without troubling any one; but mother began to pine after him so, and to be so afraid that she should die without having seen him once more to make her peace, that she actually fell ill over it. Then at last," he continued, in a lower tone, "father could not bear to see her fretting any longer, and he packed up, and sold the little the inundation had left him in the way of stock, and bought a waggon and oxen to travel across the mountains."

"And do you really fancy you'll find the old man out here in California?" asked his hearer, with a grin.

"Why not?" was George's very natural question.

"There now, just see on what a wildgoose errand you've come; a fine notion you must have of the country here. You know about how large Arkansas is, don't you? Well, then, you could put all Arkansas into this country twenty times over,—and then go and look for some single man who may be sitting in a gulch, digging gold for his very life. There are thousands coming here every day over the mountains, and thousands more by ships; and who knows, or cares, what their names are, or where they live, or cares a cent about it?"

"But grandfather won't be among the diggers, I know," persisted George; "he's well off, and has a couple of houses here in California."

"Has he, though? Well, then, it won't be quite so difficult to ferret him out. So the old miser has got money, and won't hand over any of it, eh?"

"I never said he was an old miser," cried George indignantly, for he felt angry at hearing such an epithet applied to his grandfather.

"Well, well, it's all the same to me," chuckled the old man; "I don't want anything of him, and don't want to see him; it's your business to find him out, and to make the best of him afterwards. But where do you intend to find oxen, to get your waggon out of the snow?"

"Indeed, I don't know," replied George, with a sigh. "If you can't or won't help me, where am I to find any one else?"

"I help you! what can I do to help you?" grumbled the backwoodsman; "have I got oxen to lend you, or do you expect me to harness myself to your cart?"

"But, perhaps," suggested George, timidly, "you might lend us your little horse? We could put my mother and my sister upon it, and get them out of the snow. The things might be left to their fate, for what I care; or, at any rate, they could remain till we came back for them. Once safe in the country, we'll soon work and get others."

"Well, that ain't so altogether unreasonable," mused the backwoodsman, stroking his chin; "I could perhaps lend you my pony, or the ass; but have you got any money?"

"Money!" repeated George, his momentary hope of succour giving way to a feeling of painful uncertainty; "my father never in his life asked a person who came to him for help if he had money!"

"Sure, my lad," was the quick retort, "but that was over yonder in the States; here, you see, we're in California, and when you're not so entirely and completely strange in the country as you are now, you'll have to confess that I'm in the right. So you haven't any cash at all?"

"No," faltered the boy, "father did not give me any,

because he couldn't know that the custom here in California was so different from ours ; but he'll be sure to pay you, if you want to be paid."

"Ah, I know all about that," said the old man, stubbornly. "It ain't pleasant, dealing with ye in that way."

"Then God will help us," said George ; and, jumping up hastily, he seized his rifle and called to the dog to follow him.

"Hallo !" cried the old man, without attempting to rise from his seat, "where are you off to now, in such a hurry ?"

"Back to father and mother," answered George. "If we can't get any help here, we must make a litter of some kind, with poles and branches, and carry mother down. At any rate, we shan't ask any money for doing it."

"Ye're a spry chap, and no mistake," answered the American with a laugh ; "but stop a bit, I've another offer to make, and perhaps we may hit it yet. Will you sell that dog of yours ?"

"Hector !" exclaimed George, turning round angrily towards his questioner. He had never thought to part with his faithful friend, and his first impulse was to refuse, unconditionally ; but conscience told him that the health, perhaps even the life, of his mother and sister were more valuable than even the attachment of his faithful four-footed companion ; and the look of defiance faded into an expression of mournful regret, as he added, under his breath, "Well, yes, if you insist upon it."

Try as he would to stifle his emotion, he could not prevent a couple of rebellious tears from rising into his eyes and falling down over his cheeks ; then he continued, almost inaudibly, "Will you promise to help my mother and sister out of the snow, in return for the dog ?"

The old man bit his lips, and looked down at the ground thoughtfully, tapping a stone with his heel; then suddenly he rose and walked away into the house, without answering George's question, or even stopping to look at him. For two or three minutes the lad could hear him moving about in the hut, and turning something over and over; then he came out again, walked up to George, and laying his hand goodnaturedly on the lad's shoulder, said,—

"I've been looking after the saddles, to see if they're fit for use. It's all right, and we can start at once; but as to the dog, why, you see, I've thought better of it. In the first place, you seem uncommonly set upon him, and then, if I took him I should have another mouth to feed; so I think I'll settle with your father about my charge; so you needn't worrit yourself about that,—I shan't ask too little, that you may depend upon. But, hallo, what's in the wind now? Musquito, what are you up to, you beast?"

He had a good reason for looking up in wonder, and though George felt anything but inclined for fun, he could hardly help bursting into a loud laugh.

The Indian had listened in grave silence to the whole of the foregoing conversation. Of course, he could not understand a word of what was said, nor did the matter in hand concern him. Thus his whole attention had been engrossed by a little pipe made of rushes. He had filled this implement with tobacco, and was contentedly squatting beside the fire, blowing the smoke from the tube into the air in little blue spiral clouds.

On the failure of the supply of food from his master, the sagacious Musquito had sauntered up to the savage, looking round in search of something eatable. More in play than to satisfy his hunger, he had bitten off many of the flowers from their tall stalks among the grass; and

approaching the Indian, in pursuit of this occupation, his attention had been attracted by the tall eagle's feather that bobbed to and fro on the savage's head. At first Musquito raised his nose carefully towards this interesting object, to examine its nature ; then, either because he mistook the little bunch of pearls depending therefrom for a flower, or from pure love of mischief, he made a snap at the feather, and began pulling it vigorously.

The feather was more firmly fixed than he had anticipated ; for it was tightly bound to a tuft of hair on the Indian's scalp ; but Musquito having once taken hold, declined to let go ; and the poor savage, who had only been balancing himself on his feet in a squatting posture, and was anything but firmly fixed, suddenly found himself sprawling on his back, before he could make an effort to recover himself.

He was on his feet in a moment ; and his first impulse was to seize his bow and arrows, as he could not tell who it was that had assaulted him in so treacherous a manner. Musquito meanwhile trotted away in triumph with the stolen feather in his mouth, and only stopped when he heard the authoritative voice of his master calling him back.

"Come here, you rascal !" cried the old man ; "what have you been about ? Come here directly, I say."

Musquito put back his ears, trotted a few steps further, and then stopped.

"Come here, sirrah !—do you hear me ?"—shouted his master, "and bring the feather with you."

Musquito had certainly heard, and probably understood, what was required of him ; but he seemed not the least inclined to obey the order.

"Do you hear me, sir ?" cried his proprietor again ; whereupon Musquito suddenly dropped the stolen feather

(on which the savage immediately pounced), laid back his ears, kicked out once or twice with his hind legs, and with a shrill eh-haw, trotted off, flourishing his tail, towards the pony, which was quietly feeding about a hundred paces off.

CHAPTER VI.

HOW GEORGE AND HIS NEW FRIEND TRAVELLED INTO THE MOUNTAINS, AND WHAT THEY SAW THERE.

THE old American stood for a minute or two, looking with a smile at the frisky little Musquito; but a glance at the sun, which now stood almost in the meridian, seemed to remind him of the promise he had made. He went back into the house, brought out the two saddles, and called to the two beasts with a peculiar, long-drawn whistle. The pony answered the summons at once; but the donkey hesitated at first, showing the power of an evil conscience. On the whistle being repeated, however, he kicked out behind once, as if to throw off dull care, and came galloping behind the pony at the top of his speed.

If he expected reproaches, his fears were groundless; for his master's attention was occupied with very different matters. The pony was quickly saddled, and Musquito was similarly caparisoned. Woollen blankets were then laid upon each saddle; but, on second consideration, the old man unstrapped one of them, and threw it on the ground. The pony was, moreover, loaded with saddle-

bags containing provisions; and after the proprietor had closed his house—if such an expression can be applied to the placing two poles crosswise before the entrance—he turned to his companion, and said,—

“Now, my lad, if you like, we’ll start off at once; but will you be able to find your way back to the place where you left your people?”

“I must go back the way I came, of course,” answered George; “or perhaps there is a nearer road that would take us there quicker?”

“Did you come down by the mountain-stream where the savages are encamped?”

“Yes, certainly I did.”

“And far?”

“A good day’s march.”

“Well, then, I’ll speak to that red chap about it. They’re useless critters enough in general; but they know their way through the woods though, for all that.”

He held a short colloquy with the Indian, in the language of the country; and the savage seemed to point out to him the path he would have to follow. Then the old man nodded, and said, turning again to George,—

“It’s all right. I know the forest pretty well about here, and will bring you out by the stream, higher up. Then you’ll have to find your own way. So now get upon Musquito. We shall move all the faster in that way than if we have to trudge. If we come to any very steep places, we can always get down.”

The boy was glad enough to avail himself of the permission. But first he went up to the Indian, whose hand he took and shook heartily—the only means by which he could express his gratitude for the help he had received. The savage seemed perfectly to understand his meaning; for he nodded in a friendly way, and appeared

very well satisfied with the result of their expedition. The old man stood by his pony, looking on.

"But is that famous stag to be rotting all alone in the forest?" asked George. "It's a great pity to waste so much good meat."

"Never you fear about that," answered his friend, laughing; "the red-skins will send their squaws and their dogs after it, fast enough,—and by this evening you may be sure there'll be nothing left but the bare bones. But that fellow, yonder, ought to have something, too, for his pains. Here, you red-skin, come this way! What does the fellow stand gaping at, with his big mouth wide open?—and what teeth the rascal's got—here, you can take the blanket that's lying there; d'ye understand me?"

The savage picked up the blanket, and was going to offer it to the old man.

"You're to keep it, woodenhead, and not to go running about with that dirty cotton rag of yours through the snow—well, don't you understand that much English?—to wrap it round ye. Stars and stripes, what a fool the fellow is!"

He made energetic signs to the Indian to throw the blanket round him. But the red-skin could not be made to believe that such a valuable present was intended for him, till the American translated his speech, as best he could, into the Californian dialect, which he did with a vehement energy that quite startled his auditor. All at once the Indian seemed to get an inkling of the true state of the case. In a moment he had wrapped the blanket round him, and nodding farewell to the donor and to George, he turned away, and began running up the incline and towards the bushes with such speed, that they lost sight of him in a few moments.

"Now just look at that noodle," growled the back-

woodsman ; " ain't he running, as if he had stolen the blanket, and the constable was coming after him ? These fellows are a stupid lot, more than one could imagine. But come, now, my lad, it's getting late, and I mustn't waste too much time about your business, either. Time's money here in California, as you'll find out yourself before you've been here long."

With far more agility than could have been expected from a man of his years, he threw himself into the saddle, kicked his pony's sides with his heels, and galloped off into the bush with his long gun laid across his saddle-bow, leaving George to follow as best as he could.

George did not find it necessary to urge the beast he rode to speed. Musquito knew very well that he belonged to the pony, and to the gentleman who rode it, and followed at the top of his speed, and with every demonstration of spirit and satisfaction. His rider had enough to do to maintain his balance on the broad pack-saddle, without stirrups ; and it was some time before he accustomed himself to the rather unsafe seat.

Still he took care to note the direction in which they were going, that he might find his way back in case of need.

His conductor seemed pretty confident as to the route they were to follow, and let his horse trot as fast as it would so long as the path was tolerably easy. But the higher they mounted the more did they become involved in the snow ; and at last they were obliged to ride at a foot-pace, and at times even to dismount, and lead their beasts by the bridle. Thus their progress was of necessity slow, and evening closed in before they had accomplished their journey. Of course, they could not think of proceeding in the dark. Not only did the dense thickets render such a course impracticable, but the sky,

now covered with clouds, did not allow of their following a given track with any certainty; so they were obliged to make up their minds to stay where they were, and encamp for the night.

A fire was quickly kindled, and though they had noticed no water in the neighbourhood, there was snow enough to make coffee with; and they had soon made the best arrangements they could for the night. The animals were rather badly off,—the pony at least was—for Musquito began philosophically to pluck some red berries from the bushes that grew near their fire, and to devour them with manifest relish; but as for the pony, he was obliged, as his master expressed it, “either to chew bark, or go to bed without his supper.”

The night was not so inclement and stormy as the last had been; still towards morning there was a rather severe fall of snow, which did not decrease much when the day broke. Silently and unceasingly the great flakes came floating down, pressing the boughs of the bushes almost to the earth with their weight.

This was anything but convenient to our two travellers, and the old man often looked up to the dark sky, and then shook his head, muttering to himself. He was very monosyllabic in his replies, and, indeed, appeared tremendously cross—always cutting George very short when he attempted to begin a conversation. The lad could not help thinking that his companion already repented his offer of assistance. It may have been so; but still he appeared anxious, now that they were so near the goal, to finish the task he had undertaken. After a very frugal and hasty breakfast, he resumed his march in the direction they had followed the previous day, without saying a word, till at last they came upon the little stream which he supposed to be the one George had

described. To make sure they had to cross the stream, as George's journey had been on the opposite bank. They accomplished the transit with some difficulty, and shortly afterwards George recognized a tree he had barked with his knife on his road downwards. This left no doubt of the fact that they were not only beside the right stream, but in the very neighbourhood of the spot where he had left his parents on the last day but one.

His conductor made no reply to the joyful shout with which George greeted this discovery. He only nodded to him, and then urged his pony to greater speed; for the more haste they made, the sooner they would be able to leave the snowy regions, and it appeared as if the winter had begun in the heights in good earnest, though it was still early in the year.

They had thus ridden on in silence for another hour, George being now in advance, when the boy suddenly raised a joyful cry, and pointed to some object before them. He had descried the waggon through the bushes, and in a moment the American was at his side.

"Are they there?" he asked, with a much greater appearance of sympathy than he had yet manifested.

"There stands the waggon," cried George, in reply.

"But I don't see any smoke, or any people."

George did not answer. He felt as if some one had thrown a heavy weight upon his chest. He would have hailed the waggon, but he could not utter a sound; and leaving his beast, which he had been leading by the bridle, to shift for itself, he ran with rapid steps up the incline.

When the American, following a little more slowly, overtook him, he found the boy standing with a pale, scared face, beside a deserted camping-place, looking at it with a bewildered gaze, and pointing to the traces

of a fire, long burnt out, and the ashes already half-covered with snow.

"Hallo!" exclaimed the American, with rather a startled glance around him. "What's all this? Flitted, gone! Well, that's a nice affair, upon my word. If I didn't think from the first that would be the end of it?"

George still stood beside him, mute with surprise and fear. Suddenly his eye fell on the waggon. He saw that the canvas cover had been torn away, and some of the contents of the vehicle lay strewn around. The boxes had been broken open; and at this sight a new and terrible thought came into his mind.

"Merciful Heaven!" he cried; "what can have happened here? They have been attacked—robbed—*murdered!* and I was not there to help them. Oh, my mother! my father! and my poor, poor, little sister!"

He hid his face in his hands; and unable to conceal his grief, sobbed aloud.

The old American stood by him, and shook his head as he looked first at the tumbled boxes and baskets, half covered with snow, and then at the ground, likewise hidden beneath a snowy veil, on which a number of traces, half obliterated by fresh fallen flakes, could still be discerned. Hector, too, seemed surprised at the appearance of things in and about the waggon, and went to and fro with every hair on his back bristling up.

"Hum," muttered the experienced American; "I'm half inclined to think the dog's in the right, and that some band or other of red-skinned rascals has been playing tricks here. But we'll soon find out the rights of that."

He leaned his rifle against the waggon, and began briskly to examine the traces round about. It did not escape his practised eye that some of the articles heaped

pell-mell on the ground were only covered with a thin coating of snow, and, indeed, were not even entirely hidden, while on others the white veil lay to the depth of three or four inches. With a careful hand he removed the loose flakes from the traces that looked the most recent, and then distinctly recognized the marks of naked feet, that could belong only to Indians. There was now no doubt that a troop of these red-skins had been there that very morning, and had perhaps only left the spot an hour ago. But what had become of the white people? of the woman and child, and the man who accompanied them? They could not have been murdered; certainly not to-day, for the fire would then have been still smouldering, or at least the place where it had been kindled would have been too warm to allow the snow to lie on it for a moment unmelted.

The old man encouraged the dog to search the place all over; a direction which Hector obeyed with loyal good will. The traces of the Indians were everywhere still fresh. Every little heap of snow was turned over, but nothing came to light beyond the plundered and empty boxes.

George, who had at last recovered sufficiently to assist in the search, was bewildered on finding a little black bag, in which he knew that his father had kept his money, and of which his mother always kept the key, open and empty, but with the key sticking in the lock. He called his companion's attention to the circumstance.

"I'll tell you what, my boy," said the old man, sententiously, "something out of the common has evidently happened here, and the Indians have had something to do with it. But whether they've been the cause of the disturbance, or came after it was all over, I can't make

out. There's only one way of getting at the truth ; we must go after the red-skins."

"But how are we to find them?" asked George.

"By their traces, of course, as long as the snow keeps up," answered his friend, "and afterwards by the dog. They haven't long been gone from here, and their traces are deep enough now in the soft snow to be plain, in spite of what has fallen since they left. So the sooner we're off the better; or can you think of anything else?"

"No," replied George, with a sigh; "my head seems to be swimming round, and my heart feels ready to burst. I can't think of anything. Oh, my poor mother! my poor little sister!"

"Well," resumed his friend, "then there's nothing I can see to keep us here. The weather's getting worse and worse, too, and I shall thank God when we're clear of the snow."

The Indians had proceeded along the summit of the ridge for some distance, and had then turned off towards the valley, but further from the brook, and the two riders followed the traces, which they could make out pretty clearly, as fast as possible. Not far from the late camping-place of the white people they came to a place where the red-skins must have halted; perhaps to divide the plunder. This had evidently detained them for some time; for from that point very little snow had fallen upon the tracks they had left.

The old backwoodsman rode before; and cold and unsympathetic as he had appeared at their first setting out, he was now evidently anxious to overtake the Indians, and to obtain certain intelligence concerning the fate of the white people.

"That's what comes of it," he said, as they rode on, George having now brought Musquito to his side;

"that's what comes," he repeated, speaking more to himself than to the boy, "of our people ill-using those poor brutes of Indians. We take their country from them, we kill or drive away their deer, we cut down their oak-trees, from which they get their acorns, and spoil even their fisheries, and ill treat the poor things into the bargain at every opportunity,—or, I may say, without waiting for an opportunity. How can we wonder at it if they lose patience sometimes, and pay us back in our own coin?—and they're scarcely to blame if they take revenge on those who are innocent."

"So you really think they have attacked and murdered my poor father and mother?" asked George, with terror in his look and voice.

"Nonsense," grumbled his companion; "did I say anything of the kind? I only say one can't be surprised if the poor niggers look on every white man as their enemy. In this instance, I hope it's not so bad as all that; it would be a very rascally affair, and I don't know but that I would——"

Without waiting to finish the sentence, he urged his pony forward, and rode rapidly into the bush,—so rapidly that George could scarcely keep up with him. They had not proceeded far before they saw smoke rising at some distance below them; and riding rapidly down, they came upon the whole troop of Indians, about ten men, and eight or nine women. They had cleared away the snow from a spot that lay sheltered from the wind, and kindled a fire, round which they were cowering.

On hearing the tramp of approaching hoofs, they sprang up hastily, and the men seized their weapons. But the old American, holding his rifle ready for action in his hand, and governing his horse with his knees only, rode right into the midst of them, and seemed to

be in search of some one on whom to wreak his vengeance. The Indians, however, seemed to know him; for they lowered their raised bows, and an old savage with grey hairs stepped forward, and addressed the intruder in friendly tones.

A few rapid questions and answers passed in the language of the natives, of which George understood not a word. But he saw in a moment that they were in the right track. Some of the women were dressed in garments belonging to his mother; and not far from the fire he descried some articles of clothing belonging to himself lying under a tree.

The old man's first address to the Indians had sounded rough and peremptory enough; but while he spoke to the old Indian he became quieter, nodded once or twice, and then turned to George, to interpret briefly what the Indian had told him.

According to the statement of the old savage, whom the American declared he knew as a good dependable fellow, the red-skins had that morning come by chance upon the place where the waggon stood, without, however, discovering a trace of fire, or any signs of white people. They had certainly considered the property they found as lawful spoil, and had accordingly taken with them whatever seemed worth carrying off, and not too heavy for their wives to take; for the men never bear burdens, but will only carry the game they have shot, deeming every menial employment dishonourable. They did not know what had become of the whites, and, in fact, had not taken any trouble to ascertain.

The old man was still explaining all this to George, when the lad suddenly noticed that one of the Indians wore a remarkable ornament in his black snow-covered hair. The article in question looked like a piece of

twisted paper. George called his companion's attention to this circumstance, in a few hasty words, and the old American had scarcely cast his eyes on the paper before he rode up to the proprietor, and before the latter had any suspicion of his intention he had jerked the paper from the savage's locks, and was unfolding it.

It was or had been a square leaf of paper, but was terribly torn and defaced, though a few blurred pencil-marks could still be detected upon it. The damp had destroyed the greater part of the writing, and a word here and there was all that could be made out among the sodden folds. George at once recognized his father's handwriting; and in reply to the American's question, the old Indian stated that the "white rag" had been found fastened to the waggon. They had taken it down, and were much surprised to find how easily they could tear pieces off it; till one of them, taking a fancy to the strange "cloth," had stuck the remnant in his head as an ornament.

The words, which could still be made out on the paper, were as follows:—

" . . . we have . . . so come . . . waiting
for you . . . find . . . this "

All the rest had either been torn off or had become illegible from the damp; but even the few brief words were sufficient to fill the boy's heart with delight. His parents were still alive; they had left their encampment in the snow of their own free will, after pinning up the paper which was to have given him notice which way they had gone, so that he might hope to find them out, and to be restored to them. Where he should discover them was certainly a mystery, for the unhappy destruction or

mutilation of the paper had rendered it impossible for him to follow their traces at once. Still, they were *alive*; no misfortune had happened to them; and he felt determined to find them out, if he had to search for them from one end of California to the other.

His more experienced companion certainly shook his head at George's hopeful way of looking at things. The boy knew nothing of the terrible difficulties he would have to encounter in such a search through that extensive country; but the old American did not like to create despondency in the hopeful young heart, and therefore let the boy rejoice in his expectations unhindered.

The fragment of paper was sufficient to free the Indians from every suspicion of foul play. That they had taken away the property they had found abandoned in the wood, could not be wondered at. White people would have done exactly the same thing; and they had no means of knowing the value of the paper they had torn. For them, it was nothing more than a strange piece of material, which they had first examined and then applied to the purpose for which it seemed best fitted; for all savage tribes are fond of decking themselves out in anything strange.

What was to be done now? George stood undecided, not knowing which way to turn, or what to attempt first; when the old American suddenly came up to him, and laying his hand on the boy's shoulder, said heartily enough,—

“Listen to me, my lad: you'll think it strange that I, who wasn't over and above ready to go with you at first, should alter my mind now; but the fact is this, I'm tired of living up among the mountains, and intend to go down into the settlements, where I shall want a companion. If you like, we'll pull on together for a bit; and as soon as either of us is tired of working with the other, he's

only to say so, and each can go his own way. If you've nothing better to propose, I'll help you to search for your parents: and about the pay, why, we'll settle all that afterwards."

George looked at his questioner in astonishment. In spite of the rough, abrupt way in which the words were spoken, and the mercenary postscript about the money, there was so much heartiness in the manner in which the old backwoodsman offered his protection to the poor friendless boy, that the youngster was unable to utter a word in reply, but could only take the American's hand and press it gratefully. The American evidently took this as a mute acceptance of his offer, for he said cheerfully,—

"Come, that will do; and now we'll begin our journey at once,—it's no good our remaining any longer up here in the cold. The snow has fallen much too thick for us to follow up any traces with advantage; so we had best find our way first of all to the Indian village you stumbled upon yesterday. If they can't give us any news of your people there, we'll just go back to my hut, and take whatever's there, or what we want of it, and be off down into the other valley. I almost fancy they must have gone that way, for most mountain travellers do. If we don't come upon them on the road at all, why we must do our best to ferret them out in San Francisco; that's where they were going, as you said, to look out for the old chap, the grandfather, or whatever he calls himself. What's his name, by the way? you've never told it me yet."

"George Hardy," answered the boy; "I myself was called George after him."

"Indeed!" said his patron, with a sharp look at him; "so he's your godfather too, is he?"

"My godfather?" repeated the boy; "no, indeed, he's not,—at least, not so far as he knows: he had gone away before ever I was christened, and never sent us any news about himself, nor did he care to hear anything about us."

"Didn't he?" said the old man, with a chuckle; "well, plague take him, we can get on without him, can't we, George? And now let us be starting."

"And are we to leave all these things behind for the Indians?" asked George.

"What good would they be to us?" answered his companion, with a shrug; "your parents are sure to have taken the best of what they had with them, for they've evidently met with a cart of some sort to go off in; and as for what the poor brutes of red-skins have grabbed for themselves, why best let them keep it."

So saying, and, as if all further question were useless, he turned his horse's head, and rode directly down the slope, to reach the lower land and get out of the snow region as quickly as possible.

CHAPTER VII.

SOMETHING ABOUT THE CONQUEST OF CALIFORNIA.

TOWARDS evening the two riders came to the Indian village, and were told that no white people had passed. The old man seemed to have expected such a reply. Without stopping to hear more, he rode rapidly on, being desirous to rest that night in his own house. They arrived at the log hut about an hour after sunset.

Here in the valley it was certainly not snowing, for the region was too warm and sheltered; but a fine penetrating dust-rain was falling, that wetted them to the skin.

For all that, the old American was in a most jovial humour that evening. They soon dried themselves at a large fire in the chimney; and with the venison that still hung in the hut, and some meal from one of the racks, the host provided a glorious supper, in the preparation of which he would hardly allow his young companion to assist him.

When their meal was ended, it appeared he had another surprise in store for George; for suddenly he seized his hunting-knife, and began digging into the floor close to the hearth; and, after a little labour, he brought forth a bottle from its concealment.

"Look here," he said, holding his prize up to the fire to let the light shine upon the contents; "I don't expect to be back for some little time, so it isn't necessary to hoard this; and a little warm spirit won't hurt

either of us after our hard riding to-day." So saying, he busied himself in preparing some grog of undoubted strength, of which George, however, partook very sparingly, as he was unused to ardent liquors. The old man did not press him, but made up by his zeal for his companion's moderation in the use of the bottle.

"You see, my boy," he said, "you've now arrived safe and sound in California; and I'm drinking this to your health, and to wish you luck and prosperity, George—— what did you say your other name was?"

"Oakley."

"Ah, George Oakley."

"And that we may find father and mother again," added George.

"Yes, yes—we shall do that," said his friend, confidentially. "After all, they can't have crept into the earth. Besides, I'll look after you for the present, and perhaps you'll think some day you might have taken up with a worse fellow!"

"But what is *your* name?" asked George; "for I must know what I'm to call you."

"My name—why, of course, you don't know it yet," answered the old man, laughing; "and yet we've been long enough together for you to know it. Now, look—if that grandfather of yours wasn't such a plaguy old screw of a miser——"

"But how do you know he's a miser?"

"How do I know it? Because he wouldn't have anything to do with his family, as you told me yourself, and what other reason can he have, but that he's afraid he'll have to help them. So, if he warn't such an old grizzly bear, I should say you might call me grandfather, till you found a better one. But as he's such a bad chap, I won't have anything to do with the name, and will

rather stick to my own, which is *False*; can you remember it?"

"False!" exclaimed George, in astonishment.

"Yes," said the old man, "George False."

"But that's an odd name," observed George. "How can a man have such a name as False?"

"Nonsense," retorted his host; "many people have names that are just as odd. What do think of my friends, Murky, and Strange, and Littlejohn?"

George laughed.

"Well," continued the American, "and yet those are real names of people who are alive now. The name's only a sort of handle to hold a man by, and to use every day; and it doesn't signify what a man's called, but how he behaves himself, and what he is."

Speaking thus the old backwoodsman threw himself down comfortably upon a deerskin he had dragged to the fire; and with his fur cap by his side, he seemed the picture of enjoyment, and just as companionable and talkative as he had before been grave and taciturn. With a smile on his face, he suddenly observed,—

"If a man don't know the name of a thing, he ought to help himself out by describing it; and that reminds me of one of my Californian friends, who rather amused me the other day. I'd slept the night before in one of their huts, and been most horribly bitten by the fleas. If the redskins kept themselves clean, which they don't, they wouldn't be able to rid themselves of the vermin, living as they do in their earthen kennels. Well, next morning I wanted to tell my friendly host—the same man, by the way, who brought you here—how I'd been disturbed. But I didn't know, for the life of me, what was the word for *flea* in their language. But he knew what I meant in a moment. 'Aha,' said the brown rascal,

grinning from ear to ear, 'know what you mean—little black thing; you put your finger on him, and he's there; you lift it up, and he isn't there.' Now, wasn't that a famous way of describing a flea?"

"Certainly it was," answered George, laughing. "But these people seem wonderfully hardy. I can't think how they manage to go as they do, with their naked feet and legs, through the snow. I could not run a hundred paces here without my shoes, I'm sure."

"Custom, custom," replied the old man. "Once, in the States, on a bitter cold day, when I could hardly keep from freezing in my thick blanket-coat, I met an Indian, with nothing in the world to cover him but a thin cotton hunting-shirt, which was full of holes into the bargain. I should have felt cold in such a rag as that in July, and as I passed him I reined in my horse, and was thinking whether it would not be an act of charity to offer the poor wretch something to cover his nakedness. But, somehow, he didn't seem to be suffering from cold at all."

"'Hallo, Indian, aren't ye cold?' I shouted, when I came up to him. 'It's a bitter day, this.'"

"'Are *you* coldy in face?' asked the fellow, in his broken English, looking at me over his shoulder, in a funny kind of way."

"'In my face?' I answered. 'Why, no; I always go with my face uncovered.'"

"'Wall,' said the Indian with a grin, '*I face all over.*' And he was perfectly right. If we were to be accustomed from our earliest years to wear light, thin clothing, we should not feel the cold half so much. But generally we spoil ourselves by wrapping up in warm garments when there's the least breath of air blowing, and make our skin so delicate that we can't bear the least cold."

"I suppose you've been in California a long time?"

observed George; "for you must have practised the language of the Indians pretty often to understand it so well. I can't make out a word of it."

"Why, yes; I've been knocking about for some few years," replied the American, "and you wouldn't easily have found a better leader. I was here long before the first discovery of gold."

"Before the gold was discovered?" cried the boy, in a tone of astonishment. "I thought that very few whites had lived here then."

"Well, there were not very many of us, certainly," was the reply; "and sometimes we had to fight our way against both the Spanish and the red-skinned natives, till the gold was discovered."

"The *Spanish* natives?" repeated George, inquiringly.

"Yes, my lad," replied the old man,—and he took a draught out of the tin can, and then threw himself back again, leaning on his elbow. "Seems to me, you know precious little about the country to make yourself so much at home in it. Didn't they tell you anything about it in the States yonder?"

"As good as nothing at all," answered George, with a slight blush. "On our farm, by the Arkansas, we had to work very hard for these last few years, and I could only go now and then to the school, which was five miles off, and just learned to read and write, and nothing more; and nobody thought about California then. But since the gold has been found, they seem as if they could find nothing else to talk about."

"Ah, I can fancy you're just right there," assented his friend. "You see, that's somehow in American nature, that a man should think most of what may concern himself. But this means, I suppose you know, that California belonged to the Mexicans till we conquered it, and

that the gold wasn't discovered till after it had been ceded to us."

"Yes, that I had been told."

"Well,—till that time the immense country had been almost without inhabitants; at least, there was no proportion between the size of the land and the few stragglers scattered here and there over its surface. The north-west coast of America, of which California forms a part, was discovered long enough ago, however. So early as the year 1528, the Spaniards, who were the first nation in the world for enterprises by sea in those days, sent discovering-ships to this part of the American continent; and the first European who set his foot on the shore was a Spaniard, named Maldonado, if I'm not mistaken; so if we allow the queer principle, that the civilized power which first makes the discovery of the existence of a new country has a right to claim the country thus discovered as its own, why then California certainly belongs by right to the Spaniards. At that time Spain and Portugal possessed nearly the whole of America; but they made such a bad use of their power, by oppressing the inhabitants, that in later years the Colonies separated themselves, by force of arms, from the mother-country, and established their own form of government. The old Spanish possessions were all changed into republics, and the Portuguese colonists founded an empire in Brazil.

"California afterwards became subject to the Mexican government. But the Mexicans never took much trouble about the country,—it lay too far out of their way, and was too cold for them; and besides, it appeared to produce little that was worth having. In time there arose in California a race of Creoles, that is, of people born of white parents in a foreign country; they were a mixed race of Spanish and Mexican descent. These people

called themselves Californians; but they kept pretty close to the Mexican fashion, in their dress, habits, and customs.

"In Upper California, which has now become the most important part of the country, very little farming was carried on. The country did not seem fruitful enough to make it pay. Besides, the regions towards the coast were not well watered, and the careless, lazy habits of the Spanish race made them take more kindly to cattle-tending than to the spade and plough. So, till the gold was found, the only commerce carried on by Californians consisted in raw hides, tallow, and a little dried meat, which the whalers who touched here were fond of taking on board. A few trappers and hunters used to come occasionally, and make little settlements, where they sold the produce of their hunting, or where they shipped them to American or European ports.

"A good many years ago, Jesuit missionaries had settled in California, with the idea of civilizing the natives, and at the same time strengthening the hands of the whites. They built missionary stations; and the old queer-looking houses are still scattered about over the whole country. The missionaries also took a good deal of trouble in trying to convert the original inhabitants of California, the red Indians, to Christianity; but, on the whole, their efforts had very little result. They certainly attached a few tribes to themselves, and induced them to settle near their stations, or at least to live there for a time. The Indians had to do some necessary work for the missionaries, to reclaim a little land, and cultivate it for the benefit of the mission, and to fell wood and draw water, wash linen and other small drudgery of the kind. In return, the priests instructed the Indians in their religion, and, what seemed quite as

important to the redskins, protected them from the attacks of hostile tribes, by affording them the shelter of their strongly-built mission-houses.

“The report given by a Frenchman, named de Mofras, will show how small the number of white people in the country was at that time. In 1842 he reckoned only 5,000 inhabitants of white descent in Upper California, spread over a space of 500,000 square miles. Of course, this had nothing to do with the Indians. Out of these 5,000, four-fifths were so-called Californians, descendants of the Spaniards, and the remaining thousand were Europeans, Americans, or Mexicans, with a few of the inhabitants of the Sandwich Islands.

“The climate of California is certainly excellent, and much warmer than you would find under a corresponding latitude on the east side of the Rocky Mountains. Still, for all that, the country would probably have been long destined to remain nothing more than a gigantic pasture-ground for cattle, if the North American and Mexican war hadn't given a new turn to its affairs. At the very commencement of the war, ships were dispatched from North America, round Cape Horn, towards the western Mexican harbours; and General Kearney at the same time proceeded thither with a small force, by land. You know what the land journey is like, my boy, and can imagine what hardships these fine bold fellows had to go through. And still the real gold country was conquered for America by a still smaller troop of adventurers; and it was before that time, too. The hero of this exploit, which was in a manner forced upon the men who achieved it, was Captain Fremont.

“He had been, like yourself, accustomed from his earliest youth to the hardships and discomfort of life in the backwoods; and before there was any notion in the

States of going to war with Mexico, he had been sent from there, with a few companions, to find the shortest and easiest route across the Rocky Mountains to Oregon.

“ John Charles Fremont, one of the best men in the States, had already had the management of two scientific expeditions,—one to the Rocky Mountains, in 1842, and another to Oregon and California, in 1843 and 1844 ; and so gallantly had he behaved on both occasions, that his country gave him the rank of Captain, and appointed him to the command of this third expedition. It was in the winter of 1845 and 1846 that he reached California with his little party. As he had heard that there were difficulties between the United States and Mexico,—though he had no idea that war had actually broken out, he behaved very carefully towards the Mexican government, so that there should be no cause of complaint against him. About a hundred miles from Monterey,—one of the chief towns, he parted from his armed force, and went forward alone towards the town, to announce to Don José Castro, who was commandant in Upper California, the object of his coming, and to ask permission to winter in the Joaquin Valley, where there was game and pasturage enough for his party ;—and the commandant granted his request. But he'd scarcely rejoined his followers, when he received intelligence that Don José Castro, in spite of the permission he had given, intended to attack him with a strong military force. The Spaniard pretended to have found out that Fremont had not come for any scientific purpose, but intended to excite the Europeans and Americans, living in California, to revolt against the government, and to conquer the country.

“ Fremont's force amounted, in all, to no more than sixty-two men ; but they were old wiry hunters, steeled

against danger and hardship; and at the first report of what was brewing, he barricaded his little camp, hoisted the American flag, and resolved to defend himself. But as he did not know whether his government would countenance such an outbreak of hostilities, he determined, after thinking the matter over, to try and avoid any attack, and pushed on, with his little troop, towards Oregon. The Californians followed him for some little distance, with a much greater force than he possessed, but never made any formal attack upon him; in fact, they didn't seem to care to meddle with the Americans, of whose rifles they were confoundedly afraid.

"So, in the middle of May, Captain Fremont reached the great Klamath Lake; and not only was he attacked by the Klamath Indians, but saw before him the great snow-covered mountain-ridge, which was hardly to be ascended so early in the year. At the same time, the Americans heard the agreeable news that General Castro was concentrating troops in their rear, with the intention of annihilating them and every American in California. Thus the little party was threatened with danger on all sides; and most people in such circumstances would have lost heart, and sought safety in flight. But that was not Fremont's way. The bold hunter had been driven to desperation, and resolved upon a desperate remedy. Though a force more than ten times greater in number than his little party was marching against him, and though his followers had been reduced by the attacks of the Indians, he hit upon the boldest plan that ever entered man's brain. He determined not to intrench himself any more against the attacking force to keep them off. He resolved to begin the attack himself, and *to conquer California.*

"On the 6th of July he formed this resolve; and

already, on the 11th, he began to carry it into execution. On that day he took a transport of two hundred horses that were going towards Castro's camp; and at day-break on the 18th, he attacked the fortified post Sonoma, which he took, capturing nine brass cannon, two hundred and fifty muskets, and other arms, besides carrying off several officers as prisoners of war. Some of the Americans in California, who now saw themselves threatened, had already joined his standard; and leaving only fourteen men in Sonoma, as a garrison, he advanced towards Monterey, to which the Americans laid siege, and beating the Californians wherever he could meet them, he drove General Castro before him.

"The Californians were good, clever riders; but, like all descendants of the Spanish race, they were poor hands at using firearms. That gave the Americans an immense advantage over them; and when Fremont's little force had united with Commodore Stockton's people, they carried everything before them.

"The war wasn't ended just yet, though; for, though the stars and stripes were waving from all the large towns, and the American government had declared that the land belonged to the States, outbreaks occurred here and there. But the Americans were too wary to be overreached. New reinforcements kept pouring in; and the treaty of peace with Mexico gave the conquered country to the United States as an indemnification for the expenses of the war, and secured us its possession for all time.

"But it's getting late, my boy," said the old American, suddenly breaking off in his story; "our blankets are dry by this time, and the sooner we go to sleep the better. Fact is, I think you're asleep already, and I've been wasting my breath all this time."

"No," replied George, in a low voice, "I was thinking of my father and mother."

"Nonsense," retorted his friend, gruffly; "we'll look out for them as soon as the sun rises. Go and rest yourself now, so that you're spry and strong to-morrow."

Without waiting for George's answer, and leaving him to make his own arrangements, he rolled himself in his blankets, and was soon fast asleep.



CHAPTER VIII.

THE ADVENTURE WITH THE GRIZZLY BEAR, AND THE STUPID
TRICKS MUSQUITO PLAYED ON THE OCCASION.

THE next morning dawned bright and clear. The weather was evidently improving, though the rainy season was close at hand, and might set in in earnest any day.

The preparations for the march were soon completed. The few articles the travellers wished to take with them were fastened to their saddles; the deerskins and some smaller matters were left in the hut by the old man, who fastened the two stakes across the entrance to do duty as a door.

"But that will not prevent any one," said George, "from going in and taking away what be likes."

"Don't mean it for that, my lad," answered the old man; "I only want to hinder any stray *beast* from coming in and destroying whatever we may leave behind."

If men should come this way, they're welcome to whatever they may find. We don't want the things, and it's not very likely we shall come back; but the hut may afford shelter to some poor fellow in the rainy season. I know how glad I should have been sometimes, if I could have found such a den. Well, how do you get on? Have you got used to riding on a pack-saddle by this time?"

"Famously," replied George, with a laugh. "Musquito's a capital fellow; one could never wish to be better mounted."

"You're right," answered his friend, smiling; "but he's a skittish critter, too. That don't matter, though. And now let us get along; we haven't much to lose here."

So saying, he sprang into the saddle; and, seeing that George had followed his example, and that Hector was jumping about barking impatiently, he gathered up the reins to ride away; but, his glance happening to rest for a moment on the old hut, he pulled up, and sat for more than a minute looking at the little deserted cottage without speaking.

"Is it not strange," he broke out at last, "that I should feel sorry at quitting this place, to which I am not bound by any real tie? This hut has afforded me nothing but a little shelter for a short time; and yet, in leaving it, I seem like going away from a home. But so it is with us in life; we're regular creatures of habit, and where we've slept for a few weeks we leave a bit of our hearts behind us. So let's be off, my lad," he added, suddenly turning his little horse; "for, now that we've got work before us, we mustn't lose time in dreaming and nonsense; and now our beasts will have to show what they're made of."

And, without waiting to see the effect of his speech upon George, he touched his pony with the spur, and rode briskly away towards the valley.

George had been looking at him with surprise; he could not make the old man out at all, or realize how he stood with him. The American seemed rough enough in speech and action; but, somehow, there appeared to be a soft, kindly heart beneath the harsh exterior. But, if so, why should the man appear almost ashamed of it and anxious to hide any appearance of gentleness from him?

He had not much leisure to reflect upon the matter. His old companion had already proceeded some distance, and Musquito was impatient, and would stand still no longer; so, giving his spirited steed the rein, he galloped rapidly after the retreating pony.

Their way led through the valley, with steep and wooded inclines shelving upwards to the right and left. Close by the little stream they found some traces of extinguished fires, and a few poles, over which some travellers had spread their tent-cloths while they encamped here, and which they had left behind them at their departure; but they overtook no caravan.

All the passengers who had reached the lower land here had hurried forward as fast as they possibly could, in hopes of at length reaching the auriferous tracts, or mines, as they were called; and a few scattered Indians, of whom our two wanderers caught sight, retreated timidly from them, and concealed themselves in the thicket. They would have nothing to do with the "Americanos."

The valley seemed, moreover, to have been very little traversed—a fact they could easily determine, as the soft soil would retain a deep impress from the waggon-wheels

whose marks would not easily be wiped away. Old False therefore proposed that they should make their way across a flat, wooded tract, covered with pine-trees, which would lead them to the broad Yuba valley, already occupied in some parts by the gold-washers. Here they would be sure to meet some gold-seekers, and were likely to obtain intelligence concerning any carts or waggons which had passed that way.

In the wood they had to ride more slowly, for the thick underwood sometimes made it very difficult for the beasts to force their way forward. They found a few open spaces, however, and at last gained the upper ridge. It was not very elevated, and was covered with glorious pines and redwood trees. They rode along this ridge for some distance, and then passed downwards towards the right into the next valley.

When they began to descend the slope, they reined in their beasts, and rode slowly side by side. George had not a very easy time of it. In going down-hill, he could not avoid slipping forward on the broad, stirrupless pack-saddle, and was fain to hold tight by the back of the saddle with his left hand, while he grasped his rifle with his right. After a time, however, he got on a little better, and a little practice enabled him to keep his seat capitably, except where their road sloped downwards very steeply indeed.

They had thus ridden on in silence for a considerable distance. Each of our travellers seemed completely occupied with his own thoughts, and glad that his companion did not begin a conversation.

Suddenly old False reined in his pony, and touched the boy's shoulder, as he rode beside him, as a mute direction that he should do likewise. George pulled quickly at the bridle, and Musquito, in an obedient fit,

not only stood still in a moment, but began at once to crop the grass with great relish. Old False pointed with outstretched arm down the incline, and George, looking in the direction indicated, saw a large grey animal, apparently rolling on the ground in a big, clumsy mass.

"What's that?" whispered the lad; while Hector, with outstretched muzzle, and tail pressed tightly in, stood still close to Musquito, gazing at the strange object, and growling to himself in a low tone.

"A grizzly bear," replied the old American in a whisper; "and, my word, but he must be a big brute, too."

"Shall I creep up to him, and shoot him?" asked George eagerly.

Old False looked at him with a comical side-glance, and a smile played round his lips.

"I do believe," he answered, "that you're foolish enough to try it, without thinking what would happen next. No, my boy; I think we'd better leave the critter down there alone. They're not a good sort to play with, and our little bullets would very likely put him in a rage. But s'pose we shot him dead—what would you do with him then? I don't know how far we may be from the next mining village, where we could sell his flesh; and I'm not fond of shooting game, and letting it lie in the forest and rot. We'll stay where we are for a moment, and see what he does; if he stays where he is, we'd better go out of his way, and have nothing to say to him; for that's a game in which many a good man has come off badly."

"But he'll see us up here," cried George, "and attack us."

"Nonsense," replied his companion, with a smile—"don't you believe any such old women's tales. If he really sees us he'll run off as fast as ever he can. It's

curious, though, that he hasn't smelt us out yet, for the wind blows straight down the slope. Let us see what he's about."

The bear, one of the largest of his species, had, till now, been lying quietly on his side, scratching up the ground with his great paws. They could not make out the reason of this manœuvre, till he suddenly slipped into the large hole he had dug, and lay rubbing his back against the cool ground, and rolling to and fro in evident enjoyment; at the same time he thrust up his paws, armed with formidable claws, and waved them to and fro in the air, just as a dog in its gambols will lie down on its back on a grass-plat and kick. He continued this sport for a long time, then he lay still for a little while, and then he would begin his unwieldy gambols anew.

He seemed to have no idea of any danger; and, indeed, it was a question if he would have avoided the approach of the travellers had he seen them.

"That fellow has been driven down from the mountains by the fall of snow," whispered old False. "They'll sometimes come right down into the settlements, without caring much about the people there; most likely he's scratching up his bed to have a nap; and we'll draw a little to one side, and keep out of his way."

"There, he begins his tricks again," said George, who could not take his eyes off the bear. "I'm quite certain I could creep near enough to have a good shot at him, without his seeing me."

"There's a good deal of hunter's blood in your veins, George," said the American good-humouredly; "but you must give up the idea of touching him. You'd have to hit the bear very cleverly indeed to disable him by a single shot; and if we only wounded him, I'm not at all sure but that he'd take it amiss."

"If I only manage to hit him," persisted George, "and he gets away with the bullet in him, he'd be sure to die in the night: and Hector will find him to-morrow morning, if he runs ever so far."

"That may be," answered his companion; "but I've told you already, I don't like to kill anything without necessity, not even a grizzly bear. Look what he's about now!"

The bear was tossing and rolling from side to side, like a merry colt; then he lay still for a moment, and then began his clumsy pranks again. Suddenly he jumped up, stood in his natural position, and shook himself like a poodle dog, so that the dust and little clods of loose earth, that had stuck to his hide in his evolutions, flew off from him in a cloud. He was almost the size of a large cow.

Hector had watched the beast's movements with unflagging attention, and seemed to mark him as an enemy. He appeared to be quite aware, at the same time, that it would not be advisable to trust himself in combat against such an antagonist; and he was not cur enough to bark where he dared not bite. So long as the bear lay on his back, kicking with his feet, Hector made no demonstration, and indeed he seemed scarcely able to make out what a formidable fellow he had to deal with. But when Bruin got up to shake himself—an action which made him look even larger than he really was—Hector began to feel uncomfortable. Growling more audibly than before, he retired a few paces, and ran right under Musquito.

Now, that accomplished beast was just a pattern of a donkey; that is, of what a donkey should be, but very seldom is. He was obedient, good-natured, peaceable, and industrious, but he was also *ticklish*—a quality

which living creatures are not able to put on or off at pleasure, but which comes to them by nature. So, directly he felt the dog touching him, Musquito tried to avoid him. Hector, seeing himself in danger of being trampled upon, sprang to one side, and in doing so tickled the sensitive Musquito, who thereupon kicked out with his hind legs, and ran a few paces down the incline.

Occupied as he had been in cropping the juicy grass, Musquito had not noticed the bear, and was probably in blissful ignorance of the existence of such a creature. George, on the other hand, absorbed in gazing at the bear, had paid no attention to Musquito, and let the bridle fall from his hand. At the donkey's first leap forward, he had instinctively clutched at the saddle behind him, and unintentionally tickled Musquito's back; at the same time the two tin cans which had been fastened to the saddle, clashed together at the sudden movement; and the donkey, disturbed by this complication of annoyances, gave a few leaps forward, broke into a run down the steep incline, and either could not or would not stop.

The old American had seen the first movement the beast made, and tried to seize Musquito's bridle. It hung too far forward on the donkey's neck for him to reach; and the next moment Musquito and his rider were careering down the slope at a terrific rate, directly towards the spot where the bear stood, looking up in astonishment at the noise they made.

George saw with horror the danger towards which he was being hurried. He was generally a quick lad, ready for any emergency; but in this terrible moment his presence of mind forsook him. Instead of throwing himself sideways from the saddle, and leaving the ass to get out of the scrape by itself, he clung the tighter as their

speed increased, and a few seconds afterwards found himself close to the shaggy monster, which seemed to await his attack, sitting half erect on its haunches, with gnashing teeth, and ears laid back in an exceedingly vicious fashion.

Whether Musquito, becoming aware of the enemy's presence, was seized with a very ill-timed fit of courage, and considered it necessary to try his strength against the monarch of the American woods, or whether, once in full swing down the steep incline, he was unable to stop, is uncertain, and will probably for ever remain undecided. Certain it is, however, that with his rider clutching fast to the saddle, and the two tin cans clashing wildly together from the rapidity of his course, he ran at the top of his speed towards Bruin. When the ferocious beast began snapping his teeth and exposing to view their horrific size, Musquito seemed for the first time to be seized with fear. He gave vent to a loud, terrified Eh-haw!—but he did not pause in his wild career.

But such a vigorous charge of cavalry, accompanied, too, by such horrifying and unearthly noises, was more than the bear had calculated on. Probably the desperate rush and the unusual din terrified him; for when the ass had approached within a few paces of him, and George was nearly beside himself at the dreadful danger towards which he was hurried, Bruin suddenly dropped down on his four paws, and began scrambling down the hill as fast as he could go. Till that moment Hector, without making use of his superior fleetness, had been content to keep close beside Musquito. As soon, however, as the bear turned to run, he plucked up courage and pursued him more closely. He rushed on in advance, and behind him came Musquito, and behind Musquito old

False, on his pony, screaming and shouting to George to stop; and thus, in breakneck fashion, the hunt went tearing down the mountain-side at Bruin's heels.

Relieved from his worst fears by the turn affairs had taken, George had been endeavouring in vain to hitch the donkey's bridle round one of his feet. It lay too far forward over Musquito's ears. The creature seemed possessed by a demon, and the race continued with unabated speed. Hector was by this time close at the bear's heels, and if Bruin, once enraged, turned upon them, a combat might have ensued in which they would have had no chance. But now old False came to the rescue: he managed to overtake the donkey, and at once saw that the steed, and not the rider, was master of the situation. With quick decision he urged his horse close up to Musquito, and forced the headstrong donkey, whom he could not stop at once, sideways towards the hill, until he succeeded in checking, and finally in stopping, its mad career.

"Hallo, my boy," he cried, laughing at George's scared face, "did you want to ride over the grizzly bear? You won't get anybody to join you in that freak, I promise you."

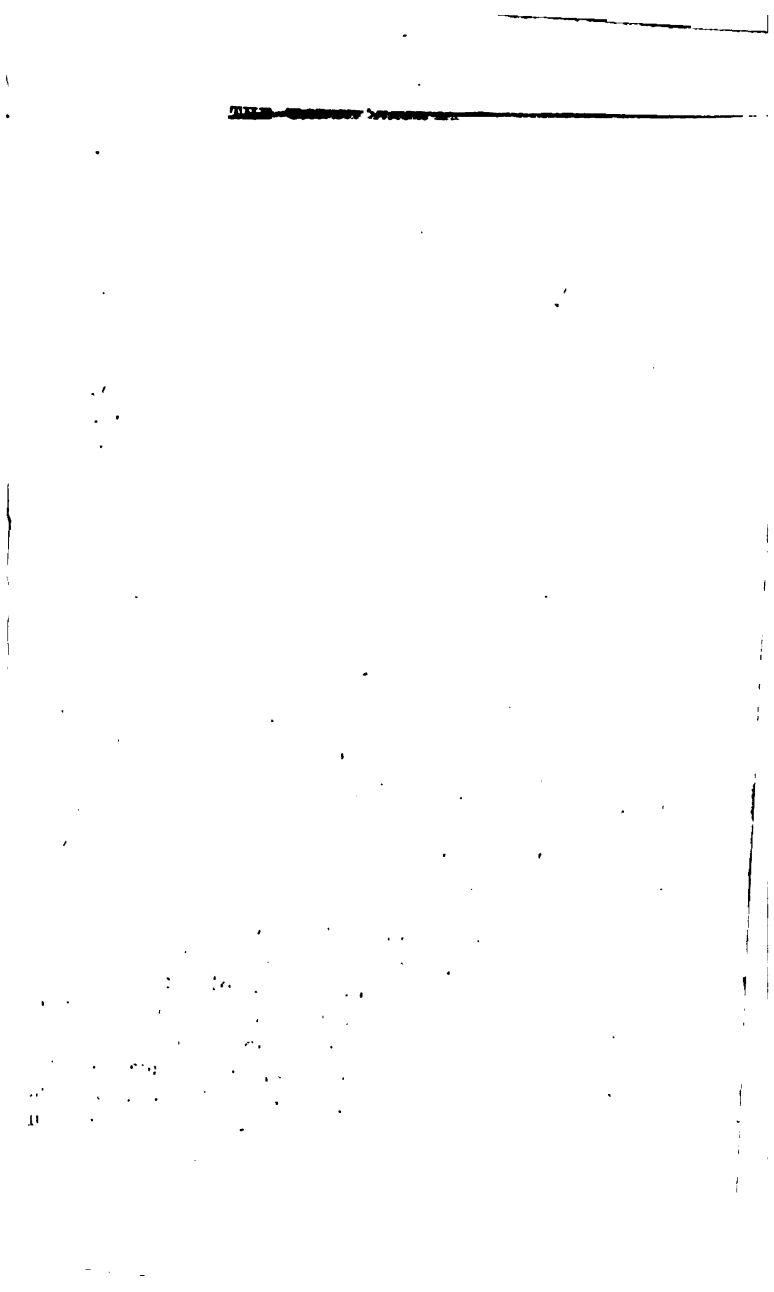
"I don't know what possessed the donkey," gasped George; "I couldn't hold him in at all."

"So it seemed to me," observed old False drily; "you may thank the bear for his kindness in getting out of the way, for it saved your life. He must have thought, 'the wiser man gives way,' and he was decidedly the wisest of you three. But hark! what was that?" he suddenly cried, as a wild clamour and shouting arose in the valley, in which the bear had vanished with Hector at his heels; "there must be some people down there, and the bear has come among them as unexpectedly as a flash of lightning





Bear tumbling into the pit.



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from a cloudless sky. Poor grizzly has tumbled from one scrape into another to-day; he seemed comfortable enough after his dust-bath, but now he's disturbed in his quiet life, and no mistake."

"Let us go down," cried George eagerly; "perhaps they're fighting with him."

"Haven't you had enough of it yet?" retorted his companion. "I only wonder you didn't lose your rifle on the road."

"I held that tight enough," replied the boy, laughing, "though, I must confess, I didn't exactly know why; it must have been from habit, for if we had been attacked by the bear, I shouldn't have known how in the world to use it."

"That's likely enough; but haven't you lost anything? the old tin cans knocked together as if they'd been fire-bells ringing the alarm."

"Everything's here, right enough," said George, looking round at the pack strapped behind him; there's nothing missing, so far as I can make out."

"Very well, then we'll ride down towards the noise yonder; there seems to be something particular doing. At any rate, we shall find some people there. But Hector hasn't come back, I see; let's ride slower than last time, please. We needn't break our necks before we get down into the valley."

The two riders proceeded somewhat hastily towards the valley; but if Musquito had been in too great a hurry before, he seemed to have taken quite another freak now: at every ten paces he made a halt, and George was obliged to drive him forcibly on; then he cocked his great ears, and put them forward as far as ever he could, uttering his loud "Eh-law" at intervals, and altogether behaving in a very singular way.

"He seems to have come to a knowledge of his misdeeds," said George, laughing. "Never mind, old grey-coat, it's no use fretting now; but be wiser another time."

CHAPTER IX.

HOW "GRIZZLY" DIDN'T SEE WHERE HE WAS GOING, AND HAD TO SUFFER FOR IT.

THEIR view into the valley was obstructed by a kind of bank, some twenty feet high, and covered with pine-trees; but scarcely had they reached the edge of this bank, when George suddenly drew rein, with a loud cry of surprise at the picture he saw suddenly spread out before him.

There lay the first mines of that wonderful land—there lay California itself, as he had so often heard it described, as he had fancied it in his light, boyish dreams; and in his joyful excitement, he forgot for a moment that he had come here without his parents, and that he entered this land of promise alone.

A valley studded with trees of glorious stature spread far to the right and left; and while the background was formed by the wild snow-covered mountains, here everything was clothed in a fresh bright garment of green,—the effect being rather heightened than disturbed by the little dots of white-and-blue tents here and there. Wherever the eye roved, it lighted upon the little cotton and canvas dwellings of the gold-washers,—some standing in groups or colonies, others built apart, wherever an

adventurer had chosen to pitch his tent for awhile here in the midst of the wood. At last they had arrived at the first outposts of the mines. The ground on which they stood was perhaps rich with gold; and the goal of which George had talked with his parents during the long nights in the mountains and in the wide desert steppes, had been reached at last, or lay only a few steps off.

He would have remained much longer gazing down into the valley, if old False had not roused him from his fit of abstraction. A sound of joyful tumult again sounded from the valley, and the old American, setting spurs to his pony, cried,—

“Forward, my lad, forward! There must be some fun or other going on down there; though I can’t see what there is so very comical about old grizzly. At any rate we’ll go and see what it is; so, quick march,—forward!”

And he began riding at such a pace down the incline, which here sloped very gently towards the valley, that George had some trouble to keep at all near him.

Once clear of the bushes they gained a complete view over the valley that lay spread before them; and now, in addition to the tents, they saw that many little block-houses and bark-huts had been erected, and the ground had been dug into deep holes in all directions. Evidently something extraordinary was going on, for the people were running from all directions towards one point, at which some thirty persons had already congregated. They also heard Hector barking in quite a frantic way, and accordingly galloped towards the spot as quickly as they could.

They had nearly realized the old proverb—“the more haste, the less speed,”—for holes, some deep and others shallow, marked only by the heaps of earth thrown up

around them, yawned everywhere along their road, and Musquito and George had a narrow escape from tumbling into one of those pits. At last there was nothing for it but to leave the beasts to themselves for a little while, and to scramble across the most dangerous places on foot. This they did; George running on before with characteristic eagerness; and they soon reached the centre of attraction, where they discovered no less a personage than their old acquaintance, the grizzly bear.

Poor Bruin was in a novel and most unenviable position. Disturbed in his morning enjoyment of the warm rays of the sun, by the unexpected and foolhardy advance of Musquito, and frightened away towards the valley by the clattering of the tin cans carried by that reckless quadruped, he had fled in blind haste through the valley, intending to gain the high and silent ridge of mountains on the opposite side. Unfortunately, however, his flight led him exactly across a spot where a number of Mexicans had been at work for some weeks, digging sundry deep holes, to get at the auriferous or gold-containing earth, which lay at some distance below the surface. If Bruin had been sulky before, he was doubly angry now, and was going to turn upon his pursuers, in a violent rage, without stopping to consider how numerous they were. But, as frequently occurs in the world, his good resolution was taken too late; for, when he turned round and tried to back out of the pit, the steep walls prevented him, and he only saw a tall human figure climbing like a cat up a thin trunk of a tree at the opposite end of the pit, and thus escaping almost from between his very paws.

A Mexican had been quietly working in the pit, with his crowbar and wooden washbowl, till suddenly, without the slightest previous warning, the great bear came

blundering down upon him. If Bruin had fallen one foot more to the right, his huge weight would inevitably have fallen upon the miner, and crushed him. Luckily for the Mexican he had been working close to the slender ladder which he used for entering the pit and leaving it, and which consisted simply of a young pine-tree, whose numerous branches had been cut off within five or six inches of the trunk, the stumps being left to serve as rungs or steps. This ladder the Mexican had seized, and had retained sufficient presence of mind to scramble to the top before the bear could pick himself up, after his unexpected fall.

Bruin had seen the man escape, and when he fell back from the steep wall, he tried to make his way out of the pit by the same means his natural enemy had employed. But the thin stumps were too slight to bear his weight, and he could not support himself on the thin pine-stem; altogether, he was too clumsy to climb.

No sooner did he find himself caught than he uttered a gruff roar, and dug his claws deeply, but vainly, into the crumbling wall, in angry efforts to escape. He had, indeed, every cause to complain of illiberal treatment, poor bear, and the worst was still to come.

The terrified shouts of the Mexican, who had so narrowly escaped the imminent danger, soon brought together a swarm of his fellow-labourers, Americans, Mexicans, and Germans, who had been at work in the neighbourhood. While the boldest and the most curious ran towards the bear-pit, the less enterprising spirits hastened away towards the wood, and some even looked out for the trees easiest to mount—for the grizzly bear cannot climb.

If Bruin had been content to work away with his formidable claws at one spot in his prison, he would soon

have brought earth enough tumbling down to enable him to make his way out; but, in his impatient rage, he rushed to and fro in the pit, biting the ground which kept him a prisoner, and the pole against which he kept bumping himself, and altogether behaved and comported himself in a wild and tearing way, as it is the nature of a fresh-caught bear to do.

As soon as the gold-washers saw that the bear could not readily make his way out of the pit, they took courage, and some came forward with their heavy crow-bars, to beat him on the head, if he should by any chance succeed in gaining the margin of the pit; others called for a rifle; and altogether it was as wild a hurly-burly as one can well imagine.

This was the state of affairs when our two hunters appeared on the scene of action, and as soon as George approached the pit, with Hector jumping around him gleefully, a hundred voices cried out to him to shoot the bear. George would soon have put an end to poor grizzly's existence, but was prevented by a man in a cotton tail-coat, and checked trousers, very short in the leg, who came bustling up with an important air. He had no sooner cast a glance at the imprisoned bear, and at the boy who stood with the stock of his rifle at his cheek, than he screamed out to him to stop, and with abundance of excited gesture, begged for a moment's delay.

"Stop, gentlemen, stop a moment," he cried, with a twang that spoke him a genuine Yankee,* "don't be in

* The name "Yankee" is given to the inhabitants of the northern states in the Union, who are celebrated throughout the whole country for their quick commercial spirit, and often do exceedingly well as travelling dealers or pedlars.

a hurry, I beg; the bear can't get out of the hole, that's certain; and even if he did, I've a notion we'd find time to hit him on the head soon with our crowbars. But now you've got him down there, if you can catch him alive, I'll pay fifty per cent. more for him than his flesh is worth."

"Stuff, man!" growled an American who was standing by; "who's to go down and catch the brute alive, I should like to know? Maybe *you'd* like to jump down, stranger, and put a muzzle on him?"

"What he say? what he want?" asked the Mexicans, who scarcely understood any English. One of the spectators, who could speak their language, interpreted the Yankee's offer.

"Good!" suddenly cried one of the Mexicans, a strongly-built, swarthy fellow, with a dark moustache and coal-black curled hair, "tell him, if he'll keep his word, we'll catch the bear alive. But where does he want him taken?"

With the assistance of the interpreter, the two soon came to an understanding. The Yankee had a waggon with four oxen near at hand, in which he had brought provisions and other saleable wares to the mines. If the Mexicans would undertake to fetter grizzly in such a way that he could not move, the Yankee would manage to knock together a sort of cage, in which the beast, properly secured, of course, could be confined and transported to San Francisco with all possible despatch.

George still stood, with his rifle cocked, near the pit in which the bear was raging to and fro. His companion had by this time come up, and conversant as he was with the Spanish language, had soon perceived what was the matter.

"It'll do," he said, turning to the Mexicans, the

bargain's well enough, as far as it goes; but this little chap here makes a claim to half the proceeds of your bear, for it was he that hunted him out of the woods with his dog down here into your pit; but if you catch the beast and bind him, George will be content with only a third of what he realizes."

The Mexicans objected strongly to this mode of reasoning; they declared that the bear had been taken in a pit belonging to one of their company, and therefore belonged to them just as he stood. But the Americans took George's part, and declared the demand made on his behalf to be perfectly just; so, at last, the two parties came to a compromise, it being arranged that the proprietor of the pit and George, as the causes of the bear's capture, should each receive a quarter of his price, the remaining half to be given as a reward to those who achieved the difficult task of binding the bear and drawing him out of the pit, so that he could be transferred to the cage. If they failed in their undertaking, so that it became necessary to despatch the bear, by shooting or any other method, they were to forfeit all claim, and George and the Mexican would then divide the entire proceeds.

The old American at first pretended to object to this division, declaring with a grin that Hector, who had gallantly aided in the bear's capture, ought not to be entirely put aside. But the Yankee offered to provide the dog with as much beef or game as he could swallow between that time and the next day, and then to allow him to carry off as much as he could hold in his mouth; upon which there was a great laugh, and old False, joining in the general hilarity, professed himself perfectly satisfied.

The bear, meanwhile, had never desisted from his

fruitless struggles ; and, lashed to increased fury by the barking of Hector and the noise and tumult among his enemies, he had even attempted, with furious bounds, to jump to the edge of the pit, and had actually succeeded in reaching it with his huge forepaws. But the loose earth came crumbling down, so that he fell back again, and absolutely roared with rage that he could not get at the jeering crowd of men above and annihilate them. If he had broken loose at that moment, he would have made sad havoc among them. The Mexicans, however, had not been idle in the mean time, for they now came running up on all sides, with lassoes—long ropes of plaited raw hide, furnished with a running noose at one end.

George did not know what use they intended to make of these implements, and thought, if they drew the bear up to the edge of the pit, all the people present would not be able to keep him from breaking loose. The Mexicans were well versed in such matters ; and as they knew how to tame the wildest bull, and to render him harmless, they thought to try the same method with the captive bear. There was not much danger in the attempt ; for as the two Americans, with their rifles, and a number of workmen, armed with heavy crowbars, stood watching the edge of the pit, poor Grizzly would have had but an indifferent reception if he had tried to break loose. The attempt to take him alive was, therefore, to be made ; but it was far from being an easy matter to achieve ; for a bear has no horns, round which to fasten a lasso, so as to hold him ; and if they had thrown a noose over his head, he would have strangled himself with it, and they would not have taken him alive.

Exhausted by his violent exertions, the bear now paused for an instant ; less, perhaps, to get breath, than to search

for some new place where he could attempt, with better success, to free himself. He had become quieter certainly, but was none the less dangerous for that. He sat, with his little eyes gleaming maliciously upward;—all the appearance of good-humour, that even the biggest bear carries about him at ordinary times, had vanished from him. With his ears put back close to his head, and his red gums and formidable fangs showing between his grinning lips, which were drawn back with an angry snarl, and his body slightly bent as if collecting himself for a spring, he really looked more like a gigantic antediluvian cat than a full-grown grizzly bear in an unpleasant dilemma.

The first attempt that was made to cast a lasso over him woke up all his slumbering fury; and he rushed at the edge of the pit with such force that he again clutched it,—but, fortunately, only with the points of his claws, which were at least six inches long. One of the Mexicans sprang hastily forward, fearing that he would maintain his hold, and scramble up with his hind-legs; and he already raised a crowbar, and aimed a blow at the bear's head. But the Yankee, who felt a great interest in Bruin's preservation, arrested his hand before the descent of the blow, which would, perhaps, have marred all his calculations.

The Mexican with the curly hair and beard had meanwhile coolly made use of his opportunity, and with really marvellous dexterity had contrived to throw the noose of a lasso round one of the hind-legs of the bear, before angry Bruin, falling back from the edge of the pit, alighted with a thump on the ground. The next moment, about twenty people had seized the lasso, and were pulling the bear backwards. He turned sharply, in a great rage; but as one leg had been drawn from under him, he

fell upon his back ; and in the same instant, a second lasso coiled itself round the hind-leg he had still free, and a third round his right fore-paw. The Mexican who threw the last noose had not, however, been quick and agile enough in his motions, for the bear managed to get the lasso in his mouth, and in a moment bit through the strong fourfold leathern plait, as if it had been so much packthread. But the other two were drawn tight, and his situation became very uncomfortable.

With all his struggling, he could not prevent the hinder portion of his anatomy from being drawn so completely upward, that his paws no longer touched the ground. Sometimes, when they touched the wall of the pit, he would cast himself forward with a huge jerk ; but this only sent him crashing against the opposite side, whence he rebounded in like manner, without in the least improving his position. Too clumsy to twist himself round far enough to seize the lassoes with his teeth, he at length became exhausted with his vain efforts, and, throwing himself on his back, roared with rage until the mountains rang again with the sound.

In throwing himself on his back, in his despair, Bruin naturally lifted his fore-paws into the air. A lasso descended, swift as lightning, upon each ; and when the bear, startled by the jerk, threw himself round, the nooses were drawn tight, so that he lay on his chest, with his nose to the ground, and was not able to struggle up again.

His frantic throes were useless : he raged like a mad bear, the foam stood on his lips, and in his fury he bit the ground on which he lay.

This went on for half an hour. All efforts to pass a lasso over his nose so as to muzzle him failed. He shook off the leather thongs as fast as they were thrown over

him, and bit three of them completely through. At length, even his sturdy bearish nature could no longer hold out against the terrible trial to which his strength had been subjected. He became tired, and lay quiet, with his muzzle pressed against the ground. The Mexicans, meanwhile, were concerting a new plan of attack.

One of them had run into the wood, and now came back with a young pine trunk, about twelve feet long and eight inches thick. Another had contrived to knot a lasso in such a manner that the noose would not close completely, and thus would restrain the bear without strangling him. When Bruin raised his head again, this was thrown completely over his neck; and now he was drawn forward, without being able to seize the lasso with his teeth, and was thus completely in the power of his enemies.

The difficult duty of binding him still remained to be performed; and it was a service of some danger, for the man who had to execute it must go down into the pit. After much solicitation, a young active man at length made up his mind to achieve the difficult task; taking the precaution, however, to have a lasso tied round his waist, so that his friends might instantly draw him up, on the first indication of danger.

The practical spirit of the Americans, quick to detect the source of a difficulty, and to find out the remedy, was of great use here. In less than a quarter of an hour, a kind of crane had been made by means of a long pole, a rope, and a pulley; so that the adventurous operator could be drawn up at a moment's notice.

He began with the bear's hind-feet. A lasso had been already firmly bound round the young tree; and carefully drawing up the bear's hind-legs, he managed to bind them firmly to the pole. The bear seemed to know

what was going on, and struggled manfully ; but his legs had already been drawn out to their full length, and were held by two lassoes, and by the strength of twenty men. Struggle as he would, he could not get them free.

The beast's front paws were now fastened separately to the pole, the bear making an ineffectual resistance each time. As soon as he began to struggle and rage, the Mexican was quickly drawn up, and not lowered again until the enemy fell down exhausted. He could not be prevailed on, however, to go near the bear's head. The huge brute's fangs looked too terribly formidable—and his little bloodshot eyes gleamed with a hungry ferocity most unpleasant to encounter. At last, when the Mexicans managed to slip a lasso under the bear's head, and to pass it several times round the pole, so that the poor beast could not move more than a few inches at a time, he took courage, and secured the knot ; and thus in the course of half an hour, poor Grizzly was as completely in the power of his merciless foes as any bear could be.

Strong cords were now provided, for the purpose of raising him out of the pit. But though smooth poles were pushed under him, and all the people present pulled at the cords, it was impossible to heave up the enormous mass that lay panting on the ground. It became necessary, at last, to dig out part of one wall of the pit, till it presented the form of an inclined plane, and then to bring the Yankee's four oxen to help.

The Yankee had already caused a number of young trees to be felled, binding their trunks together with waggon chains, of which he had brought a number for sale. A sort of cage or box, open at both ends, was thus constructed, and into this Bruin was dragged, and secured with two or three chains. Under these circumstances he

had not the slightest chance of escape. The only question was, whether he would be able to hold out, without food and water, and in his cramped condition, till they got him to San Francisco.

The Yankee seemed to have no anxiety on this head.

"My oxen are strong, and well fed," said he; "and the roads are still dry,—yesterday's rain barely laid the dust; and if I go ahead day and night, I shall get him there safe enough."

"And what use will the old chap be to you there, alive?" asked one of the spectators: "Going to make a show of him for money?"

"That's my business, friend," said the Yankee, with a grin. "You may let me alone for realizing more than my outlay on the critter."

George was not a little astonished when he heard that the Yankee had actually engaged to pay no less than two hundred and fifty dollars for the bear; he did not know that in the more distant mines the flesh alone could be sold for as much as half a dollar a pound, and for even more in the rainy season. Thus, by Musquito's help, he found himself suddenly in possession of sixty-two dollars and a half, which the Yankee declared himself ready to pay at once. He did not like to take the money, and declared that it belonged of right to his companion, as Musquito had been the cause of its being earned; but the old American would not hear of this view of the question.

"The dollars are yours—and you've every right to them," he said, heartily enough; "for if anything had gone wrong, you'd have had to pay for Musquito's nonsense. And as you had to run the risk, it's only fair that you should pocket the profits. Besides, you'll find

the money useful enough; for you can buy a few shirts and such things here in the settlement. I see the stranger's gone into the store there to pay up; so come along, and you'll see the first gold you've set eyes on in California."

"Gold!" repeated George in astonishment,—“will he pay in gold?”

"Well, in what else should he pay?" asked old False, with a laugh. "Here in the mines you might offer what you liked for a silver dollar, and I don't think you'd get one. They wash the gold out of the earth and just dry it a bit, and then they begin to trade with it at once; and everything we buy here, down to the smallest trifle, is paid for in gold-dust weighed by the ounce."

The old man was right. When they went into the store, which looked a perfect chaos of merchandise,—provisions, clothes, and tools of every description being heaped together in motley confusion,—they saw the Yankee engaged in weighing off the gold in four portions to pay for his purchase; and George received a whole handful of little shining yellow nuggets of various sizes, of which he scarcely knew how to dispose. His companion soon relieved him of this difficulty, by purchasing for him a little bag of tanned leather. A number of these articles were hung around for sale, though George was rather surprised to find that the price demanded for them was as much as a whole skin would have cost in the States. They then bought two shirts and half a dozen pairs of socks, at an equally high rate, and went out to see poor Bruin carted off into captivity.

That business was soon concluded. The hind-wheels had been taken off the waggon, so that the fettered bear and his cage could easily be pushed forward into their proper place; then, with the help of strong levers, and

amid general rejoicing, the waggon was raised up, and while some were employed fastening on the wheels, others ran to harness the oxen.

At first these "horned steeds" were rather restive, and did not seem to approve of their passenger; but, once under way, they only ran the faster along the tolerably smooth road at every fresh growl from the prisoner in the waggon,—and in less than half an hour the Yankee and his dangerous purchase had disappeared together down the valley, hidden from sight by the thick undergrowth of bushes.



CHAPTER X.

HOW GEORGE'S COMPANION COULD TELL WONDERFUL STORIES.

IN all the excitement and noise which accompanied the capture of the grizzly bear, George had not had an opportunity of remembering the object of his coming. Now, however, he felt exceedingly anxious to obtain, in this busy place, some intelligence of his parents,—and the man who kept the store seemed a very likely person to whom to apply on such a subject.

To the storekeeper, therefore, he turned; and describing his parents as best he could, eagerly asked if the man had seen anything of them.

"Why, my good young man," answered the dealer, "that's all very well; but we've something else to do here than to notice the people who come to us, so as to remember them when they're gone. There have been

some people passing through here the last few days, sure enough, and in waggons and carts, too, and some of them had brought their wives and children ; but people of that kind don't stay any time at such a place as this ; they carry all they want with them, and if they want anything, and stop to buy it, they always think at first, when they hear the prices we ask, that we want to cheat them. They soon get used to Californian prices, though. The women never come near us at all—the most we see is a man now and then, when they want tobacco, or the saltbox is empty. There's no good place here, either, for them to camp ; for though there's grass to be found here and there, all the firewood has been burnt for a long way round ; so they generally go on two or three miles further, where they can have wood, water, and grass, for the trouble of picking up."

That was all the storekeeper had to say. Others, of whom they made inquiries, confirmed his report, that several waggons, whose occupants had been surprised by the snow in the mountains, and had suffered great hardships, had passed through the settlement on the two previous days. They described the travellers as having looked very ill and careworn from their sufferings in the bad weather : two or three women had, indeed, been very ill—and no wonder, for many had died on the road.

There was clearly nothing for it but to follow these waggons as quickly as they could. Among the travellers there was at least a hope of finding the party they were in search of, while here there was nothing further to be done.

They despatched a hasty meal in the tent, which was likewise a sort of eating-house, where miners who had no convenience for cooking used to subscribe by the week for their board, at the rate of four ounces (about

thirty-two dollars, or six pounds ten shillings English money) per week; then they took some ground coffee, and a few other necessities for their journey, and went in search of a good place to pasture their animals, that Musquito and the pony might strengthen themselves for further toil. After an hour devoted to rest, they sprang to their saddles, and, refreshed and invigorated, rode briskly along the road.

Before dark they overtook the waggon with the captive bear, who had been, so the people said, anything but a quiet passenger. For the first hour of his journey he had been quite motionless, and as if stunned, bearing all the jolting of the waggon over the uneven road with stolid equanimity. But when the waggon stopped, and his keepers humanely endeavoured to thrust some moss and soft leaves under him, that he might be easier, he had begun to rage and to struggle afresh against his bonds. Luckily the chains held fast; but the drivers passed a very anxious half-hour; and it was not until, on the advice of the Yankee proprietor, the waggon was again set in motion, that Bruin could be induced to be quiet. They marched with their rifles loaded, so as to be ready for the worst, and that they might shoot master Grizzly at any time, if he should succeed in freeing himself.

They overtook nothing else all the afternoon; and as it was necessary to be careful of their beasts, they took up their quarters for the night on the bank of a little stream, before it became quite dark.

Their arrangements were soon made. The sky promised a fine starlight night; and after they had prepared their simple supper, they talked merrily of the adventure of the day, with many a laugh at Musquito's ill-timed temerity.

"I should never have thought," observed George,

"that a grizzly bear could run so fast: he was down the steep incline in a moment."

"That's the case with all bulky animals," answered the old man. "They seem to move slowly and clumsily enough, but in reality they get over the ground very fast, when they once make up their mind to run. Even our black bear in the States yonder, whom you'd think a horse would run down in a minute or two, often keeps men and dogs trotting after him all day long; and when he happens to be thin, he don't run slow, I can assure you."

"Then you see his fur is of great use to him in the thicket, in the peculiar way he has of running; for he brushes along with his nose close to the ground, and thrusts aside all the branches and creeping plants with his smooth fur, making his way through them very much like a wedge. Horses and dogs are not up to that. They always lift their heads high when they run, and are often stopped by obstacles that the bear makes nothing of."

"But sometimes the bear won't run at all," observed George.

"That doesn't often happen," answered old False, "except it's an old she-bear—and they don't always defend their young—or when the bear has been badly wounded, so that he can't get away, and has to face the dogs whether he likes it or no. Then they often become dangerous. But all the stories that have got about in the world, of bears that follow men and eat them up of their own accord, are got-up tales, and haven't a word of truth in 'em."

"All beasts of prey naturally run away from a man, let them be what they will. Even the tiger will only make his spring when he can attack from behind, and fancies he's not seen—excepting when he's mad with hunger."

Our American black bear is particularly fond of running away, whenever he can see a chance of making his escape; and among all the number of bears I have killed, I only found one case in which a bear, or rather a she-bear, was not afraid to see me, but came and attacked me.

"I was a young fellow at that time—young at least to what I am now, for I was only four-and-twenty years old, and I was hunting in Kentucky, the best hunting-ground in the world in those days. A tremendous big bear had been seen about our neighbourhood, and we'd been trying for six months and more to get a shot at him, but had always failed. Then it happened by chance, that I found the place where he went to water—it was about the end of February. Now, at that time of year the bears always walk in exactly the same path they have once followed, and even tread over and over again in their old footprints, so that we call their march 'making tracks.' I knew, therefore, that he'd come again, and took the trouble to hide myself, and wait till he should appear. Sure enough he came. I shot him through the heart; he ran on for a little way, but my dog soon found him; and I was not a little proud of my bear. I had not a horse with me; and as I wanted to carry home a proof to my parents that I had really killed a big Bruin, I thought I'd carry his skin home with me, and leave his carcass hanging on a tree till I could fetch it away.

"It was an awfully heavy skin, just about as much as I could manage to carry; and I was in my best days then. Still, I fastened it into a roll with strips of bark, slung it over my shoulder on a short stick, took my rifle, and set off towards my home, which was a good couple of miles off. You may fancy that I took the nearest road; and I was just working my way along by the margin of a thicket, where several oaks that had been overthrown

by some tempest lay across the path, when suddenly a bear sprang out of one of the tops that lay stretched along the ground, and made straight towards me. The brute had got so near me before ever I saw him, that in my first surprise I let the skin fall from my shoulder. In falling, the heavy bundle got entangled in my rifle, and drew it downwards, and I had not even time enough to pick it up again. I ran for my life: if the bear had followed me, he would certainly have overtaken me in a few minutes, and I should not be sitting here now telling you the story. But he seemed to be contented with having driven me away from the tree; for when, after a time, I ventured to look round, I saw him smelling at the hide I had dropped, and a minute afterwards he crept back into the thicket growling.

"Thus I was, as we say in the States, 'up a tree,' sitting there in the middle of the woods, without a rifle, and a big bear within a few hundred yards. By this time I was pretty certain that my enemy was a she-bear, and that she had taken up her winter quarters in the top of the felled tree, and had her young ones there; and that must have been the reason why she was so angry at my passing by. What was to be done now? Go home and get another rifle? I should be finely laughed at if I did that, and told them that a bear had taken away mine; so I determined, at any rate, to make an attempt to get my own back, and accordingly put down my bullet-pouch, and everything else that could have hindered me, and when I thought my surly neighbour had got quiet again, I crept back as silently as ever I could to the place where my rifle was lying. I got on well enough: nothing stirred in the tree-top, which I didn't lose sight of, you may depend, and I had crept to within ten paces of my rifle, when the plaguy she-bear caught sight of me again.

There was a cracking and crashing in the bushes ; and as for me, I turned tail, and ran off as fast as my legs would carry me.

"This time the brute drove me a little farther off than before ; but I saw that she was suspicious, and thought there were other enemies near ; so she wouldn't trust herself far from her cubs, and was satisfied to drive me away.

By this time my dander was up. I hadn't done anything to her at all, and here was the plaguy brute making me run like a lamplighter, and driving me off without my rifle ! But what was I to do ? I couldn't do much against the old she-bear with my hunting-knife,—that I knew well enough,—and my rifle she had annexed herself ; and I thought I must just make up my mind to wait till she'd gone to sleep, and then have another try. So I went off a good piece into the wood, laid myself down there under a tree, and stayed there until the cold drove me off again. Several hours had crawled by, and I tried my old game again. But it wouldn't do. The confounded brute kept too sharp a look-out ; and I had scarcely got sight of my rifle when she came bouncing out for the third time, and never rested till she had driven me off farther than before.

"Evening had closed in by this time, and I was obliged to leave my rifle in her clutches after all, and make the best of my way home. Of course, as I had reckoned, I was laughed at finely when I got there ; but the next morning we went out with horses and dogs, and things looked rather serious for the old she-bear. She managed to kill our best dog ; but we knocked her over, and took her cubs—two fine little chaps—alive."

"But suppose the bear had overtaken you when she ran after you ?" said George.

"Why, then," replied his protector, with a smile, "she would most likely have given me a cuff that would have settled me completely. But then, to make that all square, a bear once saved my life for me."

"A bear!" exclaimed George, with a look of great surprise.

"Yes, a bear, and a famous big fellow too; and he did it in a way that I shan't forget, if I live to be a hundred years old."

"But how was that possible?"

"Yes, my lad, that was rather a wonderful story; and when I think of that morning, I seem to have a cold shiver all over me. Just mend the fire a bit, and I'll tell you about it. Then we'll couch down, for we must be stirring with daylight to-morrow."

George did as he was desired; and the old backwoodsman, after sitting for a minute or two with his head on his hand, looking thoughtfully in the fire, began:—

"It's many a long year since I first went to settle in Kentucky with a brother of mine. Then, as I have already told you, there was plenty of game to be had in the woods there. Even buffaloes were still found in the most solitary parts. As for bears, we found their traces wherever we went, and deer and turkeys were to be had in such abundance that it seemed hardly worth while to shoot them. Those times are all over now; for busy working people have settled everywhere in those parts, and they don't hunt wild animals now, they exterminate them. But that has nothing to do with my story. We had several skirmishes with the Indians, who lurked about and tried to attack us whenever they could. But that didn't prevent us from hunting whenever we felt inclined so to do. You see, if a man is continually ex-

posed to a certain danger, he gets to be quite indifferent to it at last.

"In our camp at night, though, we always took care to keep together in little troops, so as to withstand any sudden attack of the Indians. In the daytime we hunted alone, each one marking out a certain space for himself, so that we should not interfere with one another, and spoil each other's sport. In the evening we used to re-assemble, and never thought of going to sleep without first setting a watch.

"I had thus gone out one morning quite alone to the banks of the Ohio, where I had a few days before seen a great many traces of bears near the water. I think this adventure, like the one I told you of just now, must have happened about the end of February, when most of the bears are still snoozing in their winter dens, and only go out now and then to drink at a stream. I remember that I took care to search the thickets and the old hollow trees in which they are fond of hiding themselves throughout the winter months. When one has had a little practice in the woods, one soon gets to know, by the appearance of the bark of a tree, whether a bear has lately climbed it; but such marks are not deep, for the beasts seem to take care to leave as little trace of their presence as possible for the hunter's information. If they're hunted up a tree with dogs, however, they dig their claws into the bark till great pieces of it fly off.

"I had no dog at that time; they were difficult to get, because, in the continued bear-hunts that took place, they either got lamed or killed outright. But for such a search as mine there is no need of a dog; and I strolled slowly through the wood, all alone, with my rifle on my shoulder. I saw plenty of deer, and wild turkeys too; but I would not shoot any, because I had strayed to some distance from

our camp, and we could get plenty nearer home. At last I came to an immense oak tree, that looked, at least, a few centuries old: it grew at the foot of a tolerably high hill, in a situation completely sheltered from the north wind; and there was such a mass of underwood and scrub round it, that I should not have found the place at all but for a kind of path that led to it through the bushes and creeping plants. I knew that the bears are very fond of making such paths for themselves; I therefore crept cautiously along it, and soon came to the old giant of the woods, who was surrounded by a glorious tangle of wild vines, and looked as if his crest was yet untouched by decay.

"There were traces on the bark which showed that a bear had been climbing up and down on the trunk; but the path on the outside rendered it a doubtful point whether the old fellow had gone out or not. I could not attempt anything with the tree, as I had nothing with me but a little tomahawk, and would have had to summon assistance. Before I brought any one so far, however, I wanted to convince myself whether the tree harboured a bear, or was only the deserted habitation of one.

"To ascertain this, I should have to climb up the trunk of the tree to a great hole that led into the interior. If I found fresh traces there, it would be worth while to come back; and if not, there would be no harm done. So I set about it at once. I hid my rifle in a thicket, lest some prying Indian should see and appropriate it; and leaving my bullet-pouch and woollen coverlet securely concealed beside it, began slowly to climb the tree.

"It was not a trifling matter; for the trunk must have been five feet in diameter, and there was a good space to get through before I came to any branches. If it had

not been for the wild vines that clung to the trunk, I could not have got up at all; but with their help I worked my way sturdily as far as the first branch, and then I got on easily enough; for, you see, I was then a strong young fellow, only seven or eight years older than you are now.

"The trunk had in former times divided itself into two great limbs; one of these had been broken off by a tempest, and had then become hollow, forming a large hole, that a bear might easily have crept in or out at. The traces there were fresh enough, and, besides, the peculiar pungent smell that arose from within was unmistakably the odour of a bear's den. I had now no doubt that a bear was asleep within the tree. But there was another hole leading into the tree, some four or five feet above where I stood; and though that was of no consequence to me now, I felt a foolish wish to put my nose in there. I had certainly to climb a little higher, to get to the hole, but that was no easy matter. I brought first my knees, and then my feet to the edge of the lower hole, and standing upright with my feet on the edge could peer into the upper one. There was not the slightest trace of a bear to be seen here, nor was the hole deep; for I could see the decayed touchwood in it some few feet down. So I had no further business there, and turned half round, to grasp a projecting bough that might assist me in my descent.

"Unfortunately, I did not think how rotten the support was on which I stood; and as I turned round, the decayed wood began to crumble away, and my feet slipped downwards from their position. I tried to recover myself; but the weight of my body was too heavy, and I could not get a firm hold with my fingers. I think that a piece of the bark which I clutched gave

way, but I'm not sure of that—at any rate, I felt myself slipping, with a rapidity that took away my breath, into the interior of the hollow tree; and in the one swift moment of my descent, my only thought was *the bear!*

“Sure enough, I plunged down upon a soft substance; and I expected nothing less than to be torn to pieces instantly, by the sharp claws and teeth of the enraged occupant; for though I had a knife with me in my belt, I did not at that first moment think of selling my life as dearly as possible. But nothing of the kind occurred. Everything around me was silent as the grave, and though at first I did not dare to move, I gradually began to regain courage, and to try and decide the vital question—whether I was *alone*.

“At first I felt, very quietly and cautiously, the substance beneath my feet. I was still half persuaded that I stood upon a bear's hide, and was too much startled to reflect that the force with which I had descended was more than sufficient to have roused the most torpid of bears from his slumbers. My hand only encountered dry decayed wood, with which the interior of the tree was covered, in a soft layer, probably several feet in thickness,—and I now made out, that I was in the *habitation* of a bear, but that the proprietor had quitted his den, either for the time being or for the whole summer.

“I had certainly not intended to examine the tree so closely; but being once there, I felt the inner wall of the tree, and found that it was scratched quite clean and smooth all round. The decayed wood that had been thus loosened made a capital soft bed, on which an old fat Bruin could very well manage to lie and sleep for a month or two, without suffering much inconvenience.

Presently the thought flashed upon me, that I should be in a very unpleasant predicament if the bear were suddenly to come home, and to find me here in his bedroom. I had certainly, as I now recollected, my knife in my belt; but I had no desire to stand the chance of his return, and prepared at once to make my way up again."

Old False sat silent for a moment or two, looking thoughtfully at the ground before him. At last he roused himself, and continued speaking slowly and with emphasis.

"A good many years have rolled over my head since that day—but it runs over me still like a cold shudder, when I think of the moment when I attempted to climb that tree, and first discovered that—*it was impossible*. As I told you, the whole inside surface had been scratched quite smooth, and the space was too broad for me to work myself upwards with my knees against one side, and my back against the other; and after three or four desperate but vain attempts, I sank fainting with exhaustion and terror on the fetid ground. I felt, with a horror I cannot describe, that I was a prisoner here—*buried alive*,—and my brain reeled when I thought what would become of me.

"That my companions would make a search for me, I knew,—but even if chance led them into this out-of-the-way place, could I hope that they would even seek me, much less find me, in the body of this oak-tree? Many a white man had fallen into an Indian ambuscade, and had never returned from hunting; and after a search of a day or two, his friends had been obliged to give him up. I thought of this, bitterly enough, as I sat for a time in brooding silence, with my face hidden in my hands; then I jumped up, and shouted with my utmost strength, in

the insane hope of being heard by somebody, if it were even an Indian, and an enemy. It was in vain—the hollow tree deadened my cry of anguish, and I felt that there was no deliverance for me from this living tomb. But I could not, and would not, sit there idly, so long as I was still capable of employing my faculties. Again and again I tried to work my way up the smooth surface, toiling and labouring till my fingers were bloody—but all in vain. I wanted the sharp claws of a bear, to help me out of such a bear's den—and each time I sank back, panting, helpless, and wretched.

“I soon renewed my attempts in a different way. I determined to work my way out with my knife, and really found that it penetrated readily through the soft wood. But only too soon I came to the sound timber, which was hard as iron, and I found that I should be starved long before I could succeed in ‘cutting myself out.’ I also thought of *fire*—and luckily I had my flint and steel with me; the touchwood would burn like tinder, and even the sound stem would soon become charred. But how could I tell that the devouring element once let loose, might not become unmanageable, and stifle me in my narrow prison?—for the whole floor under my feet consisted of this dry chippy wood. The opening through which I had so unhappily fallen, only admitted a dull feeble light, that did not even penetrate down to my place of confinement; so that there was only a kind of twilight around me. I wept—I prayed—I cursed my evil fortune, and my foolish recklessness, which had brought me into this dreadful position. In a word, I was beside myself, and was almost ready to commit suicide to avoid the more lingering death of starvation in this horrible place. But hope is a wonderful comforter in the human breast; and though I really

could not have told what it was that I still hoped for, a certain something always kept me from utterly giving way to despair.

"Suddenly I seemed to hear a crackling in the upper branches of the tree. I listened breathlessly, but the noise was not renewed. Could human beings have penetrated this solitude? I already put my hands to my mouth, to give one wild shout for help. But as I raised my head, that the sound of my hallooing might rise upwards more freely, the entrance above was suddenly darkened, and all was black around me. Could night have set in so suddenly? No, there was something *moving* above me.

"I felt how the little chips of decayed wood came raining down upon my head—and I knew that *the bear*, all unconscious of my presence, was descending slowly into his sleeping-place.

"I gave myself up for lost, and bitterly thought what little reason I had to fear death from hunger. In a last instinct of self-preservation, not wishing to fall quite unarmed into the beast's clutches, I drew my knife from its sheath, and with the calmness of desperation waited for the attack.

"Of course, you know that the bear, when he descends a hollow tree in this way, always comes down like a man would descend a ladder. In the same way in coming down outside a tree, he either clasps it with his great paws, and lets himself deliberately down, or slips nimbly to the ground if he is in a great hurry. Just so my bear came down inside the hollow stem, sniffing and snuffing all the time; for most likely he smelt me out. I heard him coming nearer and nearer. Suddenly it flashed across me like lightning, that a sudden attack might make him retreat upwards; and in a moment my

resolution was taken. It's an old saying, that we leave off being afraid of a danger when it once comes upon us: and somehow, though my heart had beat thick and fast when I first caught sight of the bear coming down upon me, I was now quiet and collected enough. My life wasn't worth a button, and I could well risk everything on the bare possibility of saving it. So I clapped my knife back into the sheath——"

"Into the sheath?" exclaimed George, who listened with painful interest to the story.

"Yes, into the sheath," repeated his friend, "for I wanted to have both my hands free. I bent myself back, and let the bear's broad back come down unmolested, till I could conveniently seize it. I had not to wait long. Ten seconds more, and I could feel his rough fur scratching my face; and, clasping his shaggy hide with both my hands, and even sticking my teeth into him for fear of being left behind, I left it to the bear to deliver me from my prison, and himself from his visitor, by returning the way he had come—and, luckily, my calculations were right.

"Old Bruin, who had come down into his den without any idea of finding it occupied, no sooner felt my weight hanging to his back, than he took fright, and began scrambling up towards the opening like mad, digging his claws into the tree, and making the bits of rotten wood fly off in showers. Once he stopped, and clung as tightly as he could to the side of the trunk. If he'd lost his balance and fallen back, there would have been an end of me; for either he would have fallen upon me and crushed me to death, or he'd have shaken me off and killed me; but, fortunately, the wood held firm, he'd stuck his claws in so deep. Again I heard the pieces rattling down right and left; and now that the tree became narrower, there

was no fear of his letting go. I don't know how many seconds it took him to climb up, but the time seemed to me like so many hours. We clattered up the tree like a hail-storm, and as the trunk grew narrower, it tore my hunting-shirt from my back in strips, and my skin too; but I didn't let go. I clutched tight with my hands and teeth till I could see daylight above me, and reached the margin of the upper hole. How I managed then I can hardly tell you; I only know that I suddenly let go the bear, and seized the edge of the hole with both my hands. The wood was broken, but tolerably sound. The bear sprang away from me, and, spreading his two great fore-paws over the trunk, clattered down the rough bark in such a hurry, that pieces as big as my hat broke off, and flew about his head. Another moment, and he vanished into the thicket, while I still held on frantically to the hole. Before I could spit his hair out of my mouth, and say, 'Thank ye,' he was off and away into the bushes.

"I was saved. I clambered over the margin of the hole carefully enough this time, I warrant you, for fear it should give way again under me, for the bear wouldn't have carried me pickaback twice. At last, I got safe over the edge, seized hold of a big branch, and was safe.

"How I got to the ground, clinging to the wild vines to break my fall, I don't know. When I felt the green earth under my feet, I fell on my knees; and if ever I prayed from a full heart in my life, it was then."

"And did you shoot the bear afterwards?" asked George.

"Shoot him!" repeated the old man sharply; "I should have thought it downright murder ever to shoot that bear. He'd saved me from a horrid death, though not exactly of his own freewill. But it's getting late, George," he

continued, turning abruptly away to wrap himself in his blanket, "and your eyes are half shut already. So good night. We've to start early to-morrow."

CHAPTER XI.

IN WHICH OUR TWO TRAVELLERS ENCOUNTER CALIFORNIAN GOLD-WASHERS FOR THE FIRST TIME.

LONG before daylight next morning the old backwoodsman was awake ; and he had already put the coffee-pot on the fire and put down the remainder of their venison to roast, and caught and saddled the pony and donkey (the former of whom had a little bell fastened round his neck), before he thought of waking George. After a refreshing wash in the clear brook, they ate a hearty breakfast ; and by the time the dawn pierced the shades of the wood, they were already trotting along the road, which could scarcely be distinguished in the gray morning mist.

To the right and left they everywhere saw the fires of the different camping-places of the gold-washers ; and when the sun rose, the miners themselves came forth to begin their daily toil.

It was a new and exciting life for the boy ; and several times he involuntarily stopped Musquitto, to watch for a moment the strange occupation of the people.

Here some were digging deep holes in the clayey soil, until they came down to the heavy rock, to which the

gold had sunk. There a party were sitting by their washing machines or cradles, which they rocked with one hand, while with the other they kept pouring water on the earth in the machine. Whatever gold was scattered among the saturated earth sank through into the box below, and was afterwards washed out once more in tin pans.

Samples of every nation seemed to be here assembled. First they would come upon a little troop of Mexicans in coloured ponchos (cloaks made in one piece, with a circular hole through which the head is thrust), and broad straw hats, working only with wooden wash-bowls, and little iron crowbars. Then came Americans, lustily attacking the hard earth with pickaxe and spade. Further on they even found a little colony of Chinese, with comical ugly faces, and black pigtails. On the other side of the brook some coloured people were at work—copper-faced fellows from the Sandwich Islands, as old False asserted. And here and there were little groups of mulattos and negroes. All were hard at work, and no one seemed to pay much attention to his neighbour. There appeared to be little intercourse among them. Gold was with them the one thing needful. And their only care was to transfer the shining dross from the earth into their pockets with all imaginable speed.

The work appeared anything but light and easy. In many places the diggers had to stand up to their knees in the icy water; and at noon the sun would pour down hotly on their heads, while their feet were benumbed with cold. Carrying the earth to and fro appeared no light labour, for the men often toiled along with streaming foreheads. But what will men not do for the sake of gold? They had quitted their homes,

and burst every family tie—they had not feared the dangerous toilsome journey by sea or land, with all its discomfort and annoyance—and it was scarcely probable that they would now be daunted by the prospect of hard toil. Still, there were many among them who had pictured gold-digging as a far less laborious occupation than their hard experience proved it to be.

George would gladly have loitered a few minutes by the gold-diggers, but his companion would not let him linger. He consoled him, however, by promising that they would stop for a short time at noon to rest the pony and Musquito.

Dinner-time came at last. But just as they were looking round in search of a good pasturing-place for their beasts, they descried in the distance the white covering of a waggon toiling along the road about a couple of miles in advance of them. This put an end to all thoughts of halting till they should have ascertained whether this waggon contained George's friends. They accordingly rode in pursuit, and at last overtook the party. George's heart beat high with joyful hope, in the expectation of finding his parents and sister among them.

Alas, they were strange faces that looked out from the waggon—pale, languid women and children, who looked almost dead from the difficulties and hardships of the journey. Even the men looked careworn and exhausted, and they could give no intelligence in answer to George's questionings. They had, indeed, had little opportunity of observing what went on around them, for it was with the greatest difficulty they had escaped with their lives from the heavy snow-storm in the mountains; and they were now straining every nerve to get to Sacramento, to sell their waggons and

their skeleton oxen. They wanted all the money they could realize to fit themselves out for the mines.

As the waggons now stopped to give the oxen a short rest, the two riders followed the example set them; and the pony and Musquito soon found themselves in full possession of their liberty on the borders of a little shady coppice, and forthwith began to make the best use of their time in cropping the grass, which was here much more burnt by the sun than higher in the mountains.

At a little distance a couple of Irishmen were at work near a little shanty they had built for themselves of rough pine-logs. One of them was sitting by the brook washing out in a tin can the earth that had already passed through the machine. George went up to him, and looked on with a good deal of interest. The man did not seem at all satisfied with his work, and scowled savagely at his visitor.

"Well, sir," said George civilly, "have you been fortunate in finding gold?"

"Gowld, is it, ye're spakin of? Bad luck to the gowld, and to the whole desaiving country," growled the Irishman, with an oath which it is not necessary to chronicle. "Sure, and it's the devil's own desait that brought me to this sorrowful place, where it's but just enough to keep me from starving that I can get out o' the earth."

"But you *do* find gold, don't you?"

"Gowld! it's tired of hearing the word I am," grumbled the man.

But he kept rattling his pan, and passing water through it, as he spoke, taking especial care not to let the inquisitive boy see whether it really contained anything or not.

George soon saw that the man was rather annoyed

than gratified by his company; and not wishing to be troublesome, he went back to his companion, who had in the mean time begun a conversation with the emigrants. When he said the Irishman had abused the country, and complained of his want of luck, the old American laughed.

"I could have told you that, my lad," he replied. "You've very little chance of hearing whether they find any gold or not. When the people really get hold of a good thing, they complain worse than ever, for fear that others should locate themselves in the neighbourhood, and cramp them for room. But if they say that the yield is good, you may be pretty sure that they've dug out little or nothing. But it's possible to get something worth having, after all; and you may do well enough in California yet, if you don't expect too much at first. It's a matter of chance, from beginning to end, is gold-digging,—a regular lottery, and nothing else; and while some—and not many, mind you—make a fortune in a few days, others go toiling and sweating for weeks and months, and just knock out what they have to spend again, and no more. But fellows like that Irish loafer are always croaking worse than any one else. Those who haven't a bit to put into their mouths at home are always the hardest to please when they go abroad; and those who were pretty well off at home manage to bear all sorts of hardships, and get along quietly enough. And this doesn't only hold good about gold-diggers; you'll find it apply in the cases of all kinds of people."

The emigrant party began now to make inquiries about the gold-washing,—an operation which they regarded with looks of curiosity and interest. The poor creatures who were so eager to learn particulars did not certainly appear in the best trim for undertaking such

heavy labour. The terrible journey had sapped their strength, and almost broken their spirit. The mother of the party and the youngest child had died on the road; and even the wife of the waggoner had been so ill, that they had despaired of her recovery. And what were they to do now? They scarcely knew; but the man was bent on digging for gold, and even full of hopeful visions.

Our two travellers chatted with them for about an hour; and then the old American sent George in the direction in which their beasts had strayed away, so that they might make a fresh start. But George stayed away an unconscionable time. His companion waited for him with growing impatience, but still George came not. At last he appeared, but without the beasts. He had searched through the whole woods without finding a trace of them. The old American now took his rifle and joined in a renewed search; but in vain they ransacked the whole thicket, and peered right and left; not a shadow of either of their steeds could they discover. There was no chance of tracing them out by their foot-steps; for many horses and mules had been trampling in the wood, and some were there even then grazing. Time was meanwhile passing away; the sun sank deeper and deeper, and it was almost evening when their ears were rejoiced by the sound of the pony's little bell, in a narrow hollow defile that branched off from one of the streams. The two steeds had there found a little shady valley with plenty of sweet grass, and they were enjoying themselves mightily, profoundly indifferent as to what opinion their masters might form of their proceedings. Musquito, indeed, seemed exceedingly loth even now to quit the place; and when George went up to him, to put on the bridle, he turned round, kicked up his heels, and ran over to the other side.

Old False, who had already caught his pony, called out to the boy not to trouble himself about the ass at all, for that Musquito was far too well accustomed to society to remain behind there alone. And, indeed, they had hardly left the place before that perverse donkey, after raising his voice once or twice, as if in remonstrance to call them back, came trotting sullenly after them, on finding that no one paid any attention to him.

They had, however, lost a great deal of time, and had to make up for the delay as best they might. Old False told George that his parents would certainly be found in Sacramento, if they did not overtake them earlier. According to his thinking, that was the most likely place for meeting them ; and he opined, moreover, that the name of Sacramento would have been found written on the paper they had left behind, if the stupid Indian had not torn the best half of it off.

Keeping down close by the Feather river, they now left the goldwashers' tents behind them ; for in the broad bed of this river, where it approaches the Sacramento, no gold had until then been found,—or, at any rate, not enough to render it worth while to wash there.

There they encountered many parties bound for the mines ; waggons laden with provisions, troops of mules, panting under heavy burdens, and solitary foot-passengers, who, with spade on shoulder, were going to try their luck. Nearly every one was armed. The travellers corroborated the former reports, asserting that they had met several waggons with travellers across the mountains ; one party on this side of the Feather river, and two waggons nearer on the road to Sacramento,

Night was already falling, when they came to the mouth of the Feather river. There they really overtook a wagon-party, encamped in the neighbourhood of the

little, newly-erected tent-town. Yet here they could gain no intelligence of George's parents; and as the beasts had rested longer than usual, the friends determined to push forward a little further, so as to be very early in Sacramento the next day.

It was between ten and eleven at night, when at last their tired steeds began to flag. They had come to a deserted hut on the banks of the Sacramento river, in which white people had doubtless lived at some earlier epoch. The valley of the river, in which a row of thick oaks had sheltered the grass from the full heat of the sun, offered a tolerable pasture, and the whole place seemed very convenient for an encampment. As the sky remained clear, and only a heavy dew was falling, they preferred passing the night under a tree to ensconcing themselves in the old dirty building, which looked unpleasantly suggestive of vermin; and very few minutes had elapsed, before they were comfortably stretched before a roaring fire.

At a little distance, they had passed another fire, before which two white men were cowering. They had noticed this in riding by, but had not entered into conversation with these fellow-wanderers.

"What a wonderful change that same gold has brought about in this country," remarked the old backwoodsman, as, half-wrapped in his blanket, he reclined on his elbow before the blaze. "Just think, how many people we met to-day, and everywhere little towns and villages are springing up, even in the mountains, where there used to be nothing but Indians, and the bears and stags that wandered through the woods."

"But California has been inhabited for many years, has it not?" asked George.

"Well, yes,—but very thinly,—and that only in the

neighbourhood of the bay. Though it had been discovered so many years ago, and visited by white people, there was never much spirit in the emigrants who came. The country lay too far out of the way of any traffic,—that's the fact. The steppes and prairies, unfitted for cultivation, and infested by hostile tribes of Indians, and the great stony masses of the Rocky Mountains, were an obstacle on the one hand, while on the other the everlasting long journey round Cape Horn did not exactly assist navigation. Besides, there were no particular inducements here in the country to make merchants fit out ships for such a tedious and expensive voyage. Hides and tallow were to be had at various places nearer home—for instance, in South America. And even the conquest of the country by the Americans would not have made many desirous of quitting the more fertile soil of the States, with all the advantages of steamers and railways, to locate themselves in this out-of-the-way California. Many years would, at any rate, have passed away before anything like a real colony could be founded here. But all at once the magic word GOLD was heard; and you would have thought the weariness of the distance and the dangers of the great steppes, or the distant journey and the difficulties of the wild mountains, had vanished clean away. From all sides, and from all lands, the people came streaming in, and the towns seemed to grow out of the ground like mushrooms, as ship after ship landed fresh batches of emigrants."

"But how was the gold really discovered?" asked George. "And if the country had already been inhabited, how did it happen that they didn't come upon it long before?"

"Well, it's a strange circumstance, sure enough,"

answered the American with a laugh; "and they do say that the Jesuits knew about its being there, but took care to say nothing about it, for fear of luring over other people, and particularly English Protestants. But nothing certain is known about it. If they had really known of the mineral wealth of California, they would have washed it for themselves, by means of the Indians, I fancy, even if they did it secretly. But not one of the Red Indians knew anything about it. So it was only a mere rumour, after all.

"The gold was brought to light in California through a mere accident. They were digging out a milldam, which Captain Sutter, a Swiss, was having made on what was called the 'American Fork.' A man named Marshall, who had dug out a ditch after making a dam, suddenly let the water into the trench, so that the flood might wash away the loose earth; and he observed little yellow bits of metal among the dripping soil, when the water had oozed away. At first he did not quite know what to make of them. But his very first thought seems to have been GOLD—for men always try to hope for what they want. And as soon as he was certain of the nature of his prize, he at once set about working it out.

"The men who were at work up with Captain Sutter wanted, at first, to keep their discovery secret; but, bless ye, that wasn't a thing to be done—the thing spoke for itself; and the whole of San Francisco had started in no time, everybody scrambling to be first at the mines. Whoever could manage to get free ran off, and with the next ship set sail;—the news of the newly-discovered gold country of California went to New York, to spread itself over the whole civilized world as fast as steamers and sailing-packets could carry it."

"But you can't call these places *mines*," said George. "The people only dig holes in the ground, and try and find all they can in them."

"That's the only way they have of getting gold in California now," resumed his companion. "They wash it out with the rudest and most inconvenient instruments, and you may easily fancy that a good deal is wasted. Perhaps some future generation may take to gathering up what the present race of diggers throw away. For California itself the discovery was a blessing; for while in old times we were obliged to get all our provisions, excepting meat, from other countries, there'll be plenty of people now, who don't do so much as they expected in the mountains, to take to farming, and sow crops that will yield them a rich harvest. But it's late, my lad, and there's no more time for talk to-night; so do you go to sleep, that we may start fresh to-morrow."

"I only hope our beasts won't give us the slip again to-night," observed George.

"I've taken care to prevent that," replied the old backwoodsman with a laugh; "I've tied my pony's feet together, so that he can only take short steps at a time. D'ye hear the bell?—that shows they're not a hundred yards from us now. Musquito's sure not to stray far from the camp, and won't leave his companion alone. And now good night, for I'm tired."

And with his saddle under his head for a pillow, old False was soon as soundly asleep as if the softest bed in the world had been his.

CHAPTER XII.

THE NIGHT ATTACK, AND HOW GEORGE BEHAVED ON THE OCCASION.

GEORGE followed his principal's example, in so far as lying down was concerned. But a secret uneasiness, for which he could not account, prevented him from sleeping. Though the night was tolerably cool, he felt hot and restless; and a disquietude, as irksome as it was unaccountable, oppressed him almost to suffocation. He thought it must be anxiety for his parents, and tried to get rid of the mournful thought, but in vain. Although he wrapped himself closely in his blanket, sleep fled from his eyes; and once or twice he felt so restless, that he was almost tempted to jump up and wake his companion. But old False lay so quietly by the fire, and was sleeping so soundly, that George could not bear to disturb the old man, and at last resolved to conquer his feelings by a great effort. "What was the use," he kept repeating to himself, "of being over-anxious? Were they not doing all that lay in their power to find his lost parents?"

Hector, true to his usual tactics, had pressed close to his master's side, and ensconced himself, as well as he possibly could, under the woollen blanket, beneath which he had completely thrust his head. The wood was almost as silent as death; only the stream, swift and tolerably broad, rushed and foamed wherever fallen trees impeded its progress, and pushed and rustled against the tough, elastic branches, to thrust them out of the way, or to carry them along in its course.

The fire had burned down ; but before they lay down for the night, George had taken the precaution to collect a number of broken branches, so that he might make it up at any time in the night ; and some of these had caught fire by accident. The flame flashed brightly up, and threw a lurid glow over the little open space and the surrounding bushes.

George noticed the accident, and thought of rising, to draw back the branches. But there was wood enough on the other side to serve them for the following morning, and it would be of little consequence whether a few branches were burnt here, or not.

He had shut his eyes again, when suddenly it seemed to him as if a little branch had cracked somewhere in the wood ; and that he had not been mistaken was proved by a low growl uttered by Hector, who was still half-asleep. So faint was the sound, that he seemed to feel it more in his knee, on which the faithful creature was leaning its head, than by means of his ears.

There is no sound in the wood that sooner attracts the attention alike of game animals and hunters, than the low cracking of a dry twig. The stag, when he hears a heavy branch break off, lifts his head for a moment and looks towards the sound, but then resumes his grazing without troubling himself further about it ; if, however, a slight crackling reaches his ear, he starts in alarm, and in another moment is rushing headlong away from the dangerous place, which probably shelters a concealed enemy. In stalking deer, therefore, the huntsman, next to observing the direction of the wind, has to avoid most carefully every chance of treading on little dry branches, for their cracking never fails to scare away the deer. On the other hand, if a deer should by chance tread on a loose stick, he will betray his whereabouts to the lurking hunts-

man, who listens attentively for every sound of the kind, for he knows it can only be caused by some living creature, be it what it may.

George had drawn one corner of the blanket a little over his face, and had disposed his brown felt hat in such a way that the dews of night could not fall upon his head. From under this covering, which protected his eyes from the glare of the fire, he could observe the whole surrounding space; and, without moving, he opened his eyes, and looked sharply in the direction whence the sound appeared to come; at the same time he laid his hand on the dog's head with a soothing gesture, in order to quiet him; for he made up his mind that the little impudent wolves, who had already once disturbed him, and from whom they certainly had nothing to fear, were renewing their antics. He was not afraid of any other animals, for, being brought up in the woods, he knew very well that the wonderful tales people told, especially about panthers, had no truth in them.

The panther certainly, at times, creeps towards a fire, but it is very rarely that he attacks the company assembled round the blaze; and probably, when such an event occurs, it is only in cases where other usually harmless creatures would do the same. Instances are known in which a fox, a wild cat, or even a chamois, has attacked a man, and no correct theory can be formed respecting the cause of these unusual displays of courage. But the panther generally avoids the fire, and does not even like to look at it,—he creeps round it at some distance, and is not dangerous to the hunter. The bear always keeps away from a fire whenever he sees it burning.

George, therefore, had no idea of impending danger, but was rather glad at the prospect of anything that

would pass away the long hours of night, even if it was only a visit of prairie wolves. Nevertheless, he kept his eyes firmly fixed on one point; and almost involuntarily his right hand groped for the rifle, which he had placed, as usual, beside him, under the blanket.

Again he heard the sound,—this time only a slight rustling among the dry leaves, so slight, that if his attention had not previously been aroused he would not have noticed it at all. Directly afterwards he saw, at the outer limit of the belt of light from the fire, something moving, that appeared to be no larger than one of the little wolves.

"This time you're on the wrong scent, my boy," he thought, with a quiet chuckle, "for you won't find any provisions in our store except the little that's lying beside me here for our breakfast to-morrow; and that you won't get, you may depend upon it, for I didn't save it for you."

Hector seemed to be quite unaware of the presence of the wolf, for he kept his head under the blanket and went on sleeping comfortably; at least, he remained quite quiet. Once only he moved his head, as if he intended to thrust it out from under the coverlet; but George's hand was upon him, and he gave up the point. George was anxious that he should not make a noise that might disturb his old friend; and the dog seemed satisfied with having given notice to his young master that something unusual was going on.

The wolf had disappeared behind the prostrate trunk of a tree, and George heard nothing more; but knowing that the creature was not far off, he was loth to go to sleep again, for he hoped that, if all remained quiet, the little animal would venture forward again into the fire-light, so as to give him a good view. He had lain in wait

thus for about ten minutes, when he suddenly caught sight again of the dark figure; and this time it was nearer, emerging from the other end of the stem. Scarcely could he keep back the loud cry that rose to his lips when he perceived, glaring vindictively up at him, a fierce *human face*.

He was compelled forcibly to restrain himself; and for the first moment or two hardly knew what to think of the unexpected apparition. The tales he had heard of the numerous robberies in California naturally recurred to his mind; but it is generally known that such stories affect us most when we are far from the theatre of action, for then we supply the details of each adventure as we please from our own imaginations. But if we really become wanderers in the lands respecting which we have heard these marvellous tales, and everything seems to go on orderly and well, so far as we can see, we think no more of the sinister reports. And this was the case with George. Since he set foot in California he had forgotten every word of the terrible warnings circulated through the States respecting the lawlessness of the country. But now there was no room to doubt that this was really a man who came creeping up; and if his intentions were honest, what need of such secrecy and caution in his movements?

On their way they had been asked once or twice, by men who had met them, if they had "made out well" at the mines, or, in other words, if they had found plenty of gold; and the old man had observed to George, with a chuckle, that everyone took them for successful diggers, who were carrying off their booty to a place of safety, because they were riding *towards* the town from the mines. It was highly probable, therefore, that evil-disposed per-

sons had conceived this idea, and were going to take the opportunity of robbing them. But would a robber venture to attack them here single-handed?

All these thoughts passed with the rapidity of lightning through the boy's brain; and terror of what might follow so benumbed his faculties, that he could scarcely move a finger. He continued, however, to grasp his rifle, and, thus prepared, silently awaited the course of events. The face had disappeared again; and perhaps, he thought, he had been mistaken, after all.

He was not long left in doubt respecting the reality of what he had seen. Scarcely five minutes had elapsed—while his heart beat so thick and fast, that he felt its pulsation in his throat—when the head peered forth again. He could distinctly recognize the outline of a shaggy crop of hair, and a pair of fierce eyes, gleaming with savage malice, as the robber, with the evident intention of committing some deed of violence, crept round behind the old American, who lay sleeping peacefully.

Another moment, and George became aware of a slight rustling behind himself; and Hector raised his head, and seemed to be listening. But the boy's whole attention was concentrated on the enemy who threatened his companion, and who now rose slowly and cautiously from his crouching position; and now that the whole figure stood clearly displayed in the blaze of the fire, George could see glittering in the robber's hand, what he at first took to be a musket-barrel, but afterwards recognized as one of the short iron crowbars, used by the Mexicans in their mining operations.

The ruffian, for such his looks spoke him, was scarcely four paces from George's patron,—and already he raised his weapon to bring it down with a crushing blow on the

unconscious head of his victim, when George providentially succeeded in shaking off the terror that had till then frozen his faculties. With a loud shout, he threw back the blanket, and sprang up, rifle in hand; and almost unconsciously, or at least without any definite intention or object, he brought his gun to his shoulder; and pressing the trigger, he sent the charge echoing through the silent woods.

In the same swift moment, he saw the robber's raised hand descend, with the flashing crowbar in its grasp; another instant, and Hector dashed past him with an angry growl, while the old American jumped suddenly up, grasping his trusty weapon; whereupon the footpad turned and fled, crashing through the forest, without waiting for the attack.

A loud noise close behind him caused our young backwoodsman to turn his head, and, to his astonishment, he beheld Hector in desperate combat with another assailant. The dog had seized his adversary by the breast; but the robber succeeded in shaking him off, and in the next moment a second shot was fired by his retreating comrade. George distinctly heard the crash of the bullet, as it buried itself in a tree. Forgetting his own danger in his anxiety about Hector, he clubbed his musket, and rushed upon the cowardly ruffian, who, without waiting for the attack, turned at once and fled. Hector was close at his heels; but the next moment the poor dog fell, with a yell of pain, and presently came crawling back, whining piteously, to his master.

The old American had been a spectator of the short combat, and stood with his rifle ready cocked, crying out to George to reload as quickly as he could,—an injunction our hero was not slow in obeying, though he could

not not help casting anxious looks at his fourfooted friend, as he did so. Poor Hector seemed really to have received a hard knock; for he could not use his right forepaw at all, and held it up, whining piteously. The rifle was quickly ready for action, and the two friends stood awaiting a renewal of the attack.

But there were no signs of anything of the kind; and after they had waited in vain, for a quarter of an hour, in the shadow of a tree, old False came slowly up to George, and said in a friendly tone, as he grasped the boy's hand,—

"Harkee, my lad; I've every reason to believe that you've behaved very bravely in this matter, and saved my life—though I don't quite understand how it all came about. You shall have no cause to repent it, though for the present I can't do anything more than thank you for your pains."

"No thanks are due," replied George, with a blush. "I would have done the same for any stranger, and so would you: and ever since I met you in the wood, you've been so kind to me, that I look upon you as anything but a stranger."

"Well, as to the kindness," said the old hunter, with his quiet chuckle, "we won't say too much about that. I fancy I've been gruff enough once or twice. But you may be sure of this, George," he continued, in a heartier tone than he had yet assumed, "that I mean to do well by you, and am glad we have come together, for other reasons than because you have saved my life."

"But you would never have fallen into this danger if you had not started off on my account," observed George.

"On your account?" retorted his guide. "Who

told ye it was on *your* account that I started off? But let that be; we'll talk about that some other time. First thing now is to see whether they've damaged that poor dog of yours."

"Not much, I think," said George. "The pistol-shot missed him, or, at all events, only grazed his skin, here, at the side; and the blow he got with the stick, or whatever it was, has not broken any bones. He can put his foot down, though it hurts him."

"So much the better, then—and we're not hurt either. Tell me now how it all came about."

George briefly related the particulars just as they had happened; his companion did not once interrupt him, but only nodded silently at intervals. When George had finished, he said, "Yes, yes—I see it all well enough. The scamps thought we were coming back with plenty of dust from the mines; and if they'd broken our heads for us here, they knew well enough that nobody would make a bother about it. Here, in California, no one looks after any one else's business, for everybody has enough to do with his own. The whole thing wasn't so badly planned, only the fellows would have found plaguy little for their pains if they succeeded. I shouldn't wonder, by the way, if we'd to thank our two friends for this little visit."

"Our two friends?"

"I mean the fellows whose fire we passed just as it was growing dusk. It can't have been far off from here, so, most likely, they reckoned that we shouldn't travel much further to-night—if, indeed, one of the rascals didn't slink after us. Did you hit the man you fired at?"

"I don't know," answered George; "I only remem-

ber being in a great fright when I saw him aiming a blow at your head, and that I raised my gun and fired ; then, of course, the smoke prevented my seeing him, and when it had cleared away, he was gone."

"Oh! then let's see if there's any blood spilt on the ground—and Hector could lend a hand. Where was the fellow when you fired?"

"There—just behind you. Here, Hector—poor fellow ; seek, dog, seek!"

With many a whine of pain Hector obeyed the command, and limped towards the spot indicated, while the old backwoodsman followed, with his rifle in his left hand, and a burning brand from the fire in his right. Hector immediately found the right place ; but his whine of pain changed to a howl of rage when he attempted to follow up some traces he discovered, and found that he could hardly limp along. George called him back, and, on narrowly examining the ground, they found an unmistakable track of blood. The bullet had, therefore, struck the mark—but *where*, was a question they could not decide. Presently they stumbled over the crowbar the villain had used—he had either thrown it away, or dropped it in his flight ; it was also stained with blood.

"You hit him in the arm or in the hand, my lad," observed False, looking at the murderous weapon with something like a shudder, "and, under the circumstances, it was about the best thing you could have done."

"Hadn't we better follow up the trace, and see what has become of him?" said George. "We can't leave him to perish in the woods, after all."

"Very good-natured of you to think of him," grumbled his companion, "but we should be mad to try anything of the kind ; for we might be sure of falling into a snare

of some kind, and it's a chance if the fellows don't receive us with an ounce or two of lead ; for, of course, they'd think we were only following them to pay them out. No, my lad ; you let them get out of the scrape as best they can. Perhaps the wound is of no consequence ; but if it's ever so severe, the scamp has deserved it over and over again. If he'd had his way, we should, most likely, be lying beside the fire yonder, with our brains knocked out."

"But when we get to Sacramento, we shall have to give information of the attack, so that the fellows may be pursued."

"We shall just have to do nothing of the kind," chuckled the old man, "unless we've a mind to be kept there for a quarter of a year or so, for the sake of giving evidence. I wouldn't advise any one to have much to do with courts of justice, except in very bad cases, here in California, where people only think of scraping together a lot of gold as fast as ever they can. No, my boy—we'll look after our own bones as well as we can ; we won't trouble any of the court gentlemen, who have the character of being in league with the worst scoundrels going. The citizens have, in fact, talked more than once of taking the law into their own hands, and intend some day to get hold of a batch of the worst among the mob of thieves, who are running about in broad daylight under the noses of the police, and hang them right off—till that's done, the country won't be safe. I myself didn't quite believe the reports of these attacks, of which I'd heard a good deal ; but to-day I may say we've had a striking proof, and must be more careful in future."

There was no more sleep for our travellers for that night ; both were far too excited to think of slumber.

"That's the worst of California," the old hunter broke out, when they had made up the fire and were sitting before it, with Hector between them, "that it's not only working men who have come over to dig treasure out of the earth, but that almost every state, without exception, has sent out its worst characters. The United States have long been the locality to which a number of rascals found their way—some of them fugitives from justice, and others criminals who had been recently sent out from their own countries—and scamps of that kind always know how to fill their pockets in the readiest possible way. Honest labour is generally too slow a method of getting rich to suit their ideas, so they steal wherever they can find anything to lay their hands on, and sometimes add murder to robbery, if they find it necessary or expedient. From the United States all sorts of fellows of this kind, from every nation, have found their way over here. The professed gamblers, especially, are all either Americans or Spaniards, and, besides cheating at cards, they are up to all sorts of tricks. But I fancy I see morning breaking yonder, and I feel chilly, which is always a pretty sure sign that the cold morning wind is beginning to blow. Have you heard pony's bell lately?"

"Yes—just below, yonder; he can't be a hundred yards from the road."

"So much the better—then we shan't have far to seek for him."

"But suppose the thieves should be lying in ambush?"

Old False shook his head, with a smile. "No, my boy," said he, "we need hardly fear that—the two gentlemen have had enough of it for to-day, at any rate, and to spare. If they had been Indians, it might have been well to look out; but these white rascals generally make

only one secret attack—if it succeeds, well and good ; if not, they haven't the spirit to try again ; and I shouldn't at all wonder if our two friends are scampering through the woods as hard as they can go, to get out of our way as soon as possible." So saying, he rose, and shouldered his rifle ; and less than a quarter of an hour afterwards, he was seen returning with the two beasts, ready for a new day's march.

CHAPTER XIII.

SACRAMENTO ; AND THE ADVENTURE IN THE GAMING-TENT.

THE way led them here close to the bank of the river ; but at first they were obliged to proceed slowly, or Hector would not have been able to follow them. Nevertheless, before an hour had elapsed, they overtook the two waggons which they had heard were in advance of them. The men of the party had just yoked the bullocks, and were making preparations to start. A couple of women and two or three children had walked on before the waggons, to enjoy the delicious morning air.

George glanced with anxious eyes from one countenance to another ; but his father was not among these strangers, and no one could give any intelligence about him. One of the men thought, however, that there must be one or two parties before them on the road, and perhaps George might find his friends among these.

Thus another hope was crushed ; but the human heart holds fast to every fresh chance, and continues hoping to the moment when it ceases to beat.

"Onward," was the motto—and onward they trotted, towards the newly-built town of Sacramento.

The land here was a valley well covered with oaks, and the soil seemed to be remarkably good. But no signs of anything like a cultivated field could be detected—and only once, on the opposite side of the river, they had noticed a clearing which looked like the beginning of a farm. It was plain that the newly-arrived inhabitants

of California had not yet found time to recover from their first excitement. The first thing they thought about was always to try their luck in the mines; that was the idea with which they had come over; and if fortune was less propitious to them than they expected, there was always time enough to take to the more commonplace occupation of farming.

"Who's going to scratch up the ground, and sow seed," was the reply of many to whom George spoke, "when there's more than a hundredfold of the best harvest a few feet lower down?" So long as people carried about such ideas and hopes in their brains, it was not to be expected that they would settle quietly in one place, or listen with indifferent ears to the various rumours of rich mines, which were flying about every day.

At last our travellers arrived at Sacramento, on the river of the same name—and, indeed, they were in the midst of the place before they were aware of the fact. What a town it was! George could not keep from laughing when he saw the long streets of wooden booths, and blue, white, red, green and yellow tents, that rose like mushrooms in damp places, some standing alone, others in little groups or batches, and all looking as if they had grown out of the earth, instead of being erected by human hands. The shabbiest of these frail habitations often bore the most magniloquent signs; and lawyers and medical men especially seemed anxious to announce their profession to the public on canvass scrolls four or five yards long, appended to dwelling-places of coloured cotton not more than five or six feet high.

Oxen, cows, mules, and asses were to be seen wandering about like dogs among the tents, or lying very phlegmatically in the middle of the street, in such lazy fashion that carts and waggons had absolutely to get out of their

way. They were, however, the only lazy element in the picture; for everywhere there was bustle and activity, and in the stream itself, close to the shore, lay a number of heavily-freighted schooners and small craft, which had come up from San Francisco, and were discharging their cargoes here. Close by the river several hotels had been built—booths and tents of course, promising a very great deal on the exterior by means of a high-sounding sign, and fulfilling very little indeed when once you got inside. The whole object to be gained was, that people should be dazzled at the first moment, and pay without demur the huge prices demanded by the proprietors; afterwards they might go where they chose. Indeed, nobody dreamed of staying long; every one was pushing and hurrying to get away to the mines. The unhappy delusion that every man might easily earn sixteen to twenty dollars a day up there, induced the gold-diggers to part with the cash they had in their pockets, with most convenient facility.

Nobody seemed to think or to talk of anything but of gold, and all inquiries respecting newly-arrived emigrants were quite in vain. The whole town was new, filled with strangers but just arrived, and no one cared to trouble himself about his neighbour.

No satisfaction could be obtained in the tents; so our two friends wandered up and down the streets, in quest of any of the large waggons in which people crossed the mountains. By questioning the proprietors of these vehicles about the passengers who had come with them, they hoped to come upon the traces of the missing ones. But here, too, their efforts failed. Nearly all the vehicles had been sold by their former proprietors, to the dealers of Sacramento, who neither knew, nor cared, what had become of the vendors.

When once a bargain had been struck, and the money paid, each party went on his separate way; and if each met the other an hour afterwards, they would perhaps pass on like perfect strangers.

In the shops hardly anything could be bought but such things as were wanted in the mines; for instance, bacon, beans, flour, warm clothing and clumsy boots, spades, pickaxes, tin pans, and "cradles" for washing out the gold. Drinking and gambling tents were there in plenty; and while one part of the population seemed so busy that they scarcely knew which way to turn, others were sauntering listlessly, with their hands in their pockets, through the broad streets of the town, and lounging out of one tavern into the next.

On all sides, in the environs of the town, and in some cases even in the streets, fires had been lighted, around which groups of newly-arrived travellers had disposed themselves, some encamping in the open air, without even a tent to shelter them. Here a little hand-truck was being filled; there they were loading a mule with all kinds of domestic and culinary implements; and little troops were continually starting, to get to the wished-for mines as quickly as possible. Every one was armed.

In front of one of the tents, where provisions were sold, our two friends halted, with the intention of buying a supply of ship's biscuit and salted meat for dinner. George had just taken out his leather bag containing the gold he had received for the bear, to pay for his share of the purchase, when his eye fell upon a man who stood at a little distance, apparently watching them attentively.

He was a sufficiently wild-looking fellow, with an old brown hat on his head, beneath which his unkempt hair straggled out in elf-locks. He wore his right arm in a sling made of a blue cotton pocket-handkerchief; and the

glance which he turned on the boy was anything but friendly. As soon, however, as he met George's eye, he turned away, and went slowly down the street, without looking round again.

George was considerably startled; for in the one brief moment he had recognized, in the white malicious face, the features he had seen by the fire the previous night. It was the robber who had attempted to surprise his companion; and the fact that the man could not meet his look strengthened the suspicion.

George seized his comrade's arm, and hurriedly informed him of the circumstance. Old False looked at the retreating form, and said,—

"Very likely you're right, George; and his having his arm in a sling makes it all the more likely."

"But are we to let him go unpunished?"

The backwoodsman shrugged his shoulders. "What are we to do?" he asked. "We haven't any proofs against him. Besides, there's no such thing as a regular police here; so we'd better just leave things as they are. Every man defends his own skin as best he can; and as the rascal has been punished already by the wound you gave him, it's best to let him be off. If he's a wise man, he won't try it again; and perhaps the lesson he's received will be a warning to him. If he don't mend his ways, I don't much care, for then he'll meet with his reward sooner or later. If a fellow's caught in the act, here in California, they generally make very short work with him; so, for his own sake, he'd better look out sharp. Do you think he knew you again?"

"I'm sure he did," cried George: "he wouldn't have scowled in such a fierce way at a stranger."

"May-be you're right again," said the old man in a musing tone. "I'm not over well pleased at our meeting

him again; for a rascal like that would stick at nothing, and is just as likely as not to take a shot at us out of spite, if he gets a chance of doing it safely. Still, we've no call to be afraid of the fellows, for they're a cowardly lot, one and all; and since you recognized him, and he knows it, I fancy he'll take care not to come in our way again."

In the mean time the man had gone slowly down the street, and disappeared round the corner; and the two friends thought no more about him, for indeed they had enough to fix their attention in the object which had brought them hither. They went in vain from store to store, and from tent to tent, making inquiries about George's parents. No one could give them the slightest information; and even a few acquaintances of the road, whom George encountered, had not seen his friends since the day he parted from them. One and all advised him to go to San Francisco, where he would be sure to find them. This notion, however, was strongly combated by his more experienced companion.

"That's mere nonsense," he protested, "and only shows that the people are talking without knowing anything about the matter. In the first place, just consider what a crowd of people are living in San Francisco in tents, and booths, and sheds, and what not; and then judge what the chances are of finding out any one you want to see from among the mass. Secondly—and this is the chief point—it don't seem to me at all likely that your people would have started off there already, when they must be sure that you're still looking for them up here in the country. They fancy that you haven't any money, for they know nothing about the good turn the grizzly bear did you; and how could they think you'd be able to undertake an expensive trip like the journey to San Francisco.

"But does it really cost so much?" asked George.

"Do you know of anything here that *doesn't* cost much?" retorted his friend. "No boat will take us for less than thirty dollars apiece; and even then we should have to leave our beasts behind us."

"Thirty dollars!" exclaimed George in astonishment. "And how long does the journey last?"

"Only from sixteen to eighteen hours; and we've to find our own provisions: but that's of little consequence. We have the money, and if it was really likely that your people are in San Francisco, I wouldn't say a word more about it, but start off with you at once. But I'm sure they're somewhere or other in the mines, or in one of the little towns round about, waiting for you; and they won't think of going to San Francisco till they've given up all hope of finding you anywhere here."

"But what *are* we to do?" inquired poor George, with a very rueful look. "If we come upon them here, it will be through a mere chance."

"That's true enough," answered his old friend; "and, what's more, we mustn't wander about too much, or we shall ride out of their way, instead of finding them. But my advice is this: let us go back from here into the mountains by the same road we came. If we don't meet them on the way—of which there's a chance after all—we'll at any rate leave our names, and notice of the direction in which we've gone, in every store tent we pass; and if your father makes proper inquiry, he'll know well enough where to look for us. If we don't meet them now—which I fear may be the case—I'll write a letter from one of the little mining towns to a friend of mine in San Francisco, who'll look out sharply for us there; and till I get an answer from him, why we must just look out some likely spot, and try our luck at gold-washing,

like the rest of them. After all, we must think of earning something, or else we shall spend all we've got, and be in a precious fix afterwards. There's my plan for you; what do you think of it?"

"I? What should I think of it?" replied George. "I can only thank you very sincerely for taking up my cause so heartily."

"Nonsense!" replied his companion. "Didn't you save my life for me only yesterday? Perhaps that may be of more consequence than you may imagine; and perhaps I've my own plans and ends to follow, as you may learn some day, and then you'll see that I did myself as great a favour as I did you—I mean by my journey into the mines. But if we've decided on our plan, I've a notion that we ought to set about carrying it out right off, for we haven't much time to lose. So do you take a walk through the town for an hour or so, and have a good look at whatever there is to be seen, while I look after the beasts; and we shall be much more comfortable camping out in the woods than here in the town, where one can hardly pick up wood enough for a decent fire. Are you content?"

"With everything you choose to advise."

"That's well. Then, in an hour come down to the waterside, by the Elephant Hotel. You noticed the sign, didn't you?"

"Certainly I did."

"I shall come down there with the pony and Musquito, and fetch you." And so saying, he turned away, and went up the street, towards the place where he had left their steeds when they entered the good town of Sacramento.

Thus left to his own devices for the space of an hour, George sauntered slowly through the most crowded part

of the town ; and after stopping for a time to watch the unloading of some goods by the waterside, turned to walk up the main street which led from one end of the place to the other.

The objects of the greatest interest were the gambling-houses, from whose open doors there issued uproarious and unusual sounds of music. As there seemed to be free ingress and egress to and from all these establishments, George determined to inspect the interior of one.

The arrangements proved to be primitive enough ; but to the boy, who had in his whole life seen scarcely anything but the trees of the forest, the sight was such a novelty, that he was quite absorbed in wonder. The walls were usually hung with coloured calico instead of being papered, and on broad sideboards or counters stood a goodly store of bottles and glasses, filled with all kinds of intoxicating mixtures. The walls were also adorned with gaudy pictures. But the most interesting feature, in George's opinion, were the musicians, who had been hired by the proprietor of these places to lure guests by their artistic powers. When once people were induced to enter the tents, they were almost sure to begin gambling at the play-tables ; and the gentry established there took good care that the visitors, by losing their money, should pay dearly for the musical entertainment provided.

A wonderful kind of performance it was wherewith the visitors were regaled. To procure good musicians in the newly-peopled country was, of course, out of the question ; but this was considered a matter of little moment. So long as the band kept up what the guests from the backwoods called "a bang-up row," the requirements of the time were considered to be satisfied ; and the visitors listened with great complacency, hour after hour, to the strains of a barrel-organ or an accordion.

Everything was new to George ; and his delight at the ease with which one musician handled his barrel-organ, was only equalled by the wonder with which he gazed upon an old man and a girl, who were refreshing the audience in the next tent by their performance on a trombone and a tambourine. Even the Jew's harp had its votaries ; but he had met with this instrument already, and had indeed essayed his own skill upon it more than once.

His attention was gradually attracted to the play-tables, with eager groups crowding round them, and often staking whole handfuls of gold upon a single card. In most cases the visitors lost, and the heaps of gold the keepers of the tables had piled up before them increased rapidly and steadily. Once, for a moment, the boy felt tempted to try his fortune by staking something on a card ; but he remembered a warning his old friend and guide had given him on the subject, coupled with the assurance that all the gamblers in these places used false cards, and cheated in such a way that they were sure of winning. So he wisely contented himself with merely looking on.

On emerging from any tent the noise that greeted him was almost enough to deafen any one who did not contribute his quota to the general din. Here a man scraped a violin ; there another ground an organ ; farther on a song was being sung to the accompaniment of two guitars ; while over the way performers on the flute, the drum, the tambourine, and the trumpet, with every conceivable instrument of a noisy character, crashed, and banged, and blew their best, with only the thin calico partitions to divide them from each other. No wonder that the chaos of confused sound was enough to threaten the hearer with deafness.

The time his guide had allowed George for his stroll had almost elapsed, and our young friend was thinking of returning to the bank of the river, when his attention was drawn towards a tent from which the most wonderful sounds he had ever heard came moaning forth. It seemed, moreover, to be the chief point of attraction for the idlers, for, independently of those already assembled, a whole crowd stood at the door looking in, and George, naturally anxious to see all he could, joined this group. He never noticed that the man with the bandaged arm had found him out again, and was silently following him.

There was nothing more to be seen in this tent than in any of the others, except that a man stood within making music on a scale that filled the simple boy with wonder.

Till now he had thought that a person could only play one instrument at a time; but he found he had been mistaken, for here, on a little platform behind the play-tables, stood a man whose skill sufficed to set six or seven in motion, all jingling merrily together.

On his head he wore a kind of brazen helmet, with a number of little bells; a pandean pipe was stuck in his neckcloth, in such a way that he could just reach it with his mouth without using his hands; around his neck was slung a great drum, which he beat with one hand, while with the other he played an accordion, fastened to the ground by a long stick and some string; and between his knees he had fastened a pair of cymbals, which he clashed together in time; while little bells jingled at his heels, like spurs.

The whole man was, so to speak, musical from top to toe; and every movement he made was calculated beforehand, and kept time with the rest. While the performer played a melody on the pandeans, accordion, and drum, the cymbals and bells clashed a jingling accompaniment.

"Such a young rascal!" shouted a dozen angry men. "He's hardly worth run of his shield, the young cockatrice—and dead to the living already."

"Best to hang up the young swindler on the next oak," suggested others: "for that's about the best that can happen to him here in California."

"No, don't ye hang him," interposed the man with the disabled arm, trying to force his way through the crowd towards the door: "hold him tight for a moment, or two, till I find a constable—perhaps he's got some more stolen gold about him."

"Don't let him go!" begged George, who had just revolution enough to guess the swindler's design. "I tell you he's—"

"You're the right one to talk, ye young rowdy," roared the big man.

And he bestowed a shake on the captive that made him waver.

"But I tell you——" persisted George.

"Silence! You shan't tell us anything at all," interrupted the others. "Wait till the constable comes, and you'll have time enough to ease your mind, I reckon."

"Hallo! what's up here?" called a rough voice—and George felt how some new comer thrust away his long captor's arm, so as to leave him free. "What are ye all doing to the boy?"

"And pray who are you, that you must come interfering when we've caught a young pickpocket?" retorted the bearded man, with an angry stare at the old white-haired hunter, who had seized his wrist, and held it as if in a vice.

"Thank Heaven for sending you here to me!" cried poor George.

To his inexpressible relief, he recognized in the new comer his friend and patron.

"He's been stealing!" piped a thin voice from among the crowd.

"It's a lie," cried the old man passionately; "and if you've the grit to come here, I'll prove it upon you."

"Hallo, old hoss, go gently," interposed he of the beard, with anything but a friendly glance at George's protector; "we caught him, five minutes ago, with a leather bag in his pocket, that he'd filched from a stranger."

"It was the very rascal whom I shot in the arm last night," exclaimed George.

"Then it's *you* who have robbed *him*," shouted old False, stepping up boldly and angrily towards the long man. "Where's the rascal gone?"

"Oh, he's got clear off," said George.

"A hundred dollars for the man who brings the scoundrel back here!" exclaimed the old man passionately; "a hundred dollars to the first who lays hands on him!"

"Stars and stripes!" ejaculated the bearded man, in a far less confident tone than he had yet employed; for he began to have his suspicions that he had been hoaxed—"d'ye mean to say ye'll give a hundred dollars? He's gone to fetch the constable."

"And you're blockheads enough to believe him!" scolded the old hunter. "Whoever wants to earn the money must make haste, for I'm afraid the rascal's half-way into the wood by this time."

The reward was tempting enough to send off several on a searching expedition through the town. But they soon came straggling back again without their prisoner,

who, it appeared, had not been to the sheriff—to whom he would certainly have applied, if he had required the services of a constable.

The bird was flown; and the company saw, when it was too late, that they had been led away by a clever swindler; not only to aid and abet him, but actually to rob an entirely innocent person for his benefit.

Old False was in a towering rage.

“Wal,” he shouted, striking his great brown fist down upon one of the play-tables, with an energy that made the heap of gold fly up, and the players start from their chairs in affright, “what have ye to say now, ye tom-fools? There ye stand, grimacing like ring-tail monkeys in a trap. And what have ye to say, when I tell you that this chap, and some companion or other of his fell upon us last night, as we lay out in the woods, and attempted to *murder us*, and was only prevented by the sharpness of this boy, who put a bullet in his arm! And now you must go and fall on the poor lad—you grown men, and he a mere child—and take the few dollars he owns from him, on a lying accusation of that scamp, whom I saw watching us an hour or two ago, when we were buying provisions at the store? For shame of yourselves—you call yourselves citizens of the United States?”

“Confound it,” said the long man, whose face had grown longer and longer during this address; and he thrust his hand into his pocket, and brought out his own bag of gold; “we meant it all straight; and how were we to know that the rascal would dare to tell us such a lie? But I’m ready to make good part of the loss out of my own pocket; and I’m mortal sorry we used the youngster so rough.”

“There—there—keep your money,” replied the old

man, mollified at once by these conciliatory words. "I've enough, thanks be, to bear a loss like that. But mind you look out sharper another time."

"Deuce take the fellow: he'd best not come in my way again," cried the long man, doubling his fists. "I'd pay him out, principal and interest too!"

"He won't give ye a chance, stranger," grumbled old False. "You'll never see him here in Sacramento, at any rate. But come along, George; we've lost more time than enough, and must make a start right off."

He turned to quit the tent, accompanied by his young friend; but the long man put himself in the way, and held out his hand to the boy.

"Hark ye, my lad," he said, with rather a sheepish smile on his rough but good-humoured face, "let's shake hands, and don't you be angry with me for being such a fool. I'm mortal sorry to have served ye so."

George burst out laughing. He was too good-natured to bear any one a grudge who met him with such a friendly apology; and, grasping the proffered hand heartily, he replied,—

"I'm not angry with you now; I'm only vexed that the scamp carried out his design, and has got the laugh against us all."

"Well, do you know," said the other, keeping hold of the boy's hand while he spoke,—“perhaps it's not all over yet; and, if I've luck, he may run into my way some day or other; and if he does, I guess he'll leave off laughing. What's your name?"

"George Oakley."

"What, Oakley from Kansas?"

"Yes."

"Son of *John* Oakley of Kansas?"

George nodded.

"Stars and stripes!" and the long man dashed his right fist violently into the palm of his left hand; "just listen to that! A son of John Oakley, the honestest fellow in all Kansas; and me to be fool enough—but never mind—California isn't such a mortal big place but that I'll come across him some day."

"Do you know John Oakley, then?" asked George's protector.

"Just reckon I do," was the reply. "Weren't we neighbours in Missouri before he married his present wife? I was a youngster then—not much bigger than that boy; but I know what store father set by him, and how sorry every one was when he went away."

"Well, and you haven't met him here in California?"

"Not set eyes on him. Has he been here long?"

"Only a day or two. This poor lad has missed his parents somehow, and can't find them again."

"And don't he know where to look for them?"

"Not a bit of it."

"Think of that, now!" exclaimed the long man; "that's a pity, surely. Well, never mind. I'm going to San Francisco in a day or two; and if I can ferret him out I'll let you know."

"That would be first-rate," said George's protector; "then you'll only have to write to George Oakley, and send the letter to Yuba city, at the mouth of the Yuba. Will you do that?"

"Write! Well, fact is," said the great bearded fellow, blushing like a school-boy to the roots of his rough hair, "you see, I—I don't seem to manage writing very well, and feel more at home like with a rifle than with a pen. But that don't matter," he added hastily; "I'll find some one to do it for me; and, you may depend upon it, I shan't break my word. Where are you bound to now?"

"Back to the mines," answered the American; "for perhaps this boy's parents will look for him here in Sacramento, before they go on to San Francisco. We may come across them."

"Well, then, to Yuba city. Good bye, George," said the long man, shaking George's hand again; "and if I meet with that fellow, you may be sure I'll make him give back your money, if I have to thrash every grain out of him, like a corn-cob."

CHAPTER XIV.

HOW THEY STARTED FOR THE MINES.

OUR two friends now took to the saddle again ; and as they rode out of the town, bending their course towards the mountains, George's protector related how he had happened to find him in the gambling-tent. Riding by the place, on his way to the rendezvous at the water-side, he had heard the terrible disturbance, and at the same time seen their acquaintance of the former night, with the bandaged arm, emerge from the tent, and almost immediately begin running off as fast as he could among the tents.

His attention had been naturally aroused by this circumstance ; but curious, at the same time, to see what could be going on within the tent, he had sprung from his pony, and was not a little astonished to find George in such a predicament.

How the whole affair had happened was easily explained. The swindler had seen George's leather bag when the boy drew it out to pay for the provisions—had noticed where he put it—and conceived his nefarious plan, which had been only too successful.

"That rascal is certainly ripe for the gallows," was Mr. False's concluding remark ; "and he's likely to meet with his deserts—we may be sure of that. But now, if he comes in our way, we'll certainly collar him. I'm afraid, though, we shall seek for him in vain."

The travellers now returned by the same path they had

before traversed, still hoping to meet those of whom they were in quest; but in vain. They inquired everywhere, if no message had been left for them; but no one had seen or heard anything of the party. The people moreover, of whom these inquiries were made, were themselves in the habit of changing their place of abode every few days, and only took notice of what concerned their own interest. What were other people's affairs to them?

The probability seemed now that George's parents, who, according to his own account, were but very scantily supplied with money, had stopped somewhere in the mountains to work, so that they might pay for their future journey with the proceeds of their industry.

To settle this point, they determined to visit the neighbouring mining villages, and at least to leave their names there, giving Yuba city as the place whither any intelligence might be sent to them.

In "camping out" at night, they now kept a more careful watch than before, not caring to expose themselves a second time to the danger they had once encountered. They, however, succeeded almost every evening, in reaching some camping-place, where several parties bivouacked together, passing the evening in pleasant converse, and then sleeping securely in each other's company. Once in the mines, where they would everywhere find little colonies, they would have nothing more to fear.

In vain they searched about among the mountains, and explored the banks of each little stream; no trace of the lost ones could they find, and George began to be a prey to all kinds of forebodings. "After all," he thought, "some calamity must have happened to them, and I shall never see my dear parents again on earth."

His old companion rallied and comforted him staunchly on every occasion; and George was more than ever at a loss to account for the evident interest Mr. False took in the matter. He once expressed his wonder, for now that his money was gone, he felt a painful sense of dependence at being supported by his friend. But the old man only laughed and said,—

“Just make yourself quite easy, my lad. It’s pure selfishness in me. You see, I’m growing old now, and I see you’ve got a good heart; so when I can’t work any more, you won’t let me starve; and then,” he continued, in a more serious tone, “I haven’t forgotten the night when you prevented that malicious scoundrel from beating out my brains with his iron bar. That’s a debt I haven’t paid yet; so for the present we won’t say any more about it. Besides, the time has come now, of which I spoke to you some time ago, when I said we should have to look out some settled place for ourselves, where we could wait till we received news. That little nest of tents you see before us yonder, is Yuba city. In Sacramento I told you that I would write from here to San Francisco, and there’s a good opportunity for doing that just now. As I’ve heard, a day or two ago, a trustworthy man will start shortly with the mail bag for San Francisco, and he shall carry a letter for me to my old friend. If your parents are really there, or if they arrive there soon, you may depend upon it he’ll find them out, and write us a line or two right off here. While we wait for his letter, we can be looking out a place to work in, that we may earn something for ourselves. My stock of money is getting low, and it’s better to begin without waiting till we’re driven to it.”

“As for me,” said George, “it would be the very

thing I should like; and I would be ready to work with all my might; but——”

“But what?” asked his companion.

“But,” said George, “I have such a particular longing to go to San Francisco, and seek out my grandfather.”

“What—the old miser? And what makes you think you’ll find him there?”

“I really cannot tell—but after all, he’s my mother’s father, and if my parents have really gone there, my father is sure to have sought him out, on mother’s account.”

“I suppose your father don’t care much about him,” said the old man with a laugh.

“Nothing of the kind,” cried George hastily. “He was always sorry that they had not known each other, for the old gentleman would certainly have thought better of him. But malicious people, who thought to gain some advantage for themselves, poisoned his mind against father, and he was angry with him without any reason.”

“Well, if you’re so anxious about that,” said the old American after a moment’s thought, “I’ll write and tell my friend to make inquiries about your grandfather, and let me know. What did you say was his name?”

“George Hardy.”

“Yes, yes, I remember—and my friend will tell me if we can find the old fellow in San Francisco or not. If he is (and by the time the answer comes, we shall have earned our travelling expenses), I shan’t object to your going to San Francisco alone, or, perhaps, I may even go with you; for I should like to see the place once more. But till we receive something like reliable news, it would be like throwing our money into the street to be riding or driving about the world. Are you content?”

"With all my heart," replied George, grasping his friend's outstretched hand. "I am quite sure you are doing the best for me; for what advantage could it be to you to take up the cause of a poor forsaken lad? and the best thing I can do is to follow your advice. But you may be sure my father and mother will be eternally grateful to you."

"Nonsense," muttered the old man, "I have never asked for thanks, and there'll be time to think about that when I begin about it; so now come on with me into the little nest yonder, and I'll write the letter and send it away, and we'll wait for the answer, like sturdy gold-diggers as we are, up here in the mountains."

"But what are we to do for tools? They'll cost us a great deal of money."

"Tools!—why, yes—everything is horribly dear here in the mines; but if there's gold to be had, we shall get tools lent us, and can pay the cost out of what we find."

"Whoever will lend us anything?" laughed George; "nobody knows us here."

"That's nothing to do with the matter; and you will find out soon that here in California an honest face is a first-rate letter of introduction among the dealers. They'll give credit to almost any one, even if they don't know him, if a man's going to work near them; for they reckon, and shrewdly enough, that every one to whom they've loaned tools, can't do less than buy his provisions at their stores. I'll manage all that if you leave it to me. What we've got to do now is to send away the letter as soon as we can."

Without further loss of time they rode on towards the little town; and on their arrival the beasts were tethered, and George was left to his own devices for a little time, while his companion went into a tent to write the letter.

He soon came back, calling to George to bring the pony and mule to the tent. George obeyed, though he did not understand the reason of the order ; and he was not a little surprised to see, in front of the tent, two large sacks of provisions, a piece of rolled sailcloth, two spades, two pickaxes, a tin pan, and a washing-cradle, which articles, his companion told him, had been selected for them.

"And have they lent you all that?" asked George, shaking his head incredulously.

"Never you trouble about that, my lad—it's there, and we shall know how to use it. Now, we'll go out into the mountains on foot, as good miners ought to do ; and you may help me pack, so that we may perhaps reach the nearest mining village before evening."

The two addressed themselves to their task with great zeal ; and though George did not understand how to turn a pack-saddle to the best account, and to fasten all their various articles properly upon it, his experienced companion gave him such instructions that he quickly learned the art. When all was ready, George was going to take the donkey by the bridle, and lead him forward, but his friend cried out,—

"Leave Musquito alone, my lad ; he's so used to carrying burdens that he don't want any leading. When he's got his load he always goes on first, and the pony comes afterwards, and we've nothing more to do but to follow them. Woho, Musquito ! come here, my lad ! Now all our old work's going to begin again—show what you can do, and don't disgrace me before the stranger."

Musquito turned his head towards his master, laid back his long ears, and drawing his forehead into comical furrows, gave vent to a loud and impressive "Hee-haw," which sounded far into the silence of the wood. But

when his master raised his hand threateningly, he turned about again, struck out with his hind legs with such good will, that the kettles and pans rattled together and against his sides, and then set out with much deliberation along the narrow path that led to the mountains.

The pony followed, apparently not very well pleased at being employed as a beast of burden, but yet patiently enough, and the old man and his young companion, each with his rifle on his shoulder, brought up the rear.

The one of the company who appeared to rejoice most in the prospect of their march was Hector. Scarcely did he see that the two travellers were really setting out, and that they were going off into the mountains again, before he began jumping madly round and round them, barking, or rather howling, for joy, and then suddenly set off into the wood at such a rate, as if he had quite made up his mind never to come back again; but before they had well lost sight of him, he came rushing back in another direction, made a wide circuit round them, snapped at the heels of Musquito (who immediately retorted by turning round and kicking out at him), and then tore away again with undiminished speed. They had gone more than two miles before he had mastered his emotion so far as to keep pace with the little caravan, even then he could not make up his mind to follow, but placed himself at the head of the procession, with the evident intention of acting as leader and guide.

But Musquito would not accede to any such arrangement. Firstly, he objected, as an independent donkey, to any one's taking precedence of him when he was carrying a load; and secondly, he had been so much put out by Hector's insane vagaries and furious barking, that he felt heartily angry with him, though they had till then been excellent friends; when, therefore, Hector took up

a position in front of him, he at first made no objection, but tried unobserved to get nearer and nearer to him; and as Hector, in unsuspecting security, was soberly trotting along, Musquito silently thrust out his head, drew his upper lip a little back, and suddenly gave the dog's tail such a bite, that that aggrieved quadruped jumped aside with a loud yell of pain, and then retired grumbling and whining behind his master. Musquito, as if to express his joy at the success of his scheme, kicked out his hind legs once or twice, to the great discomposure of the pony, and then, without paying the slightest heed to his master's angry reproaches, continued to advance at his former solemn pace.

Thus travelling sturdily onward towards the mountains, our two friends followed the course of the stream, which flowed into the Yuba river, a little lower down; and just before it became dark, they reached a spot where stood a few little tents. A little farther on they could discern through the gathering darkness, a number of watch-fires gleaming like glow-worms; they therefore continued their march, until they found themselves in the very centre of the little colony. At the end of the line of tents, the old man proposed that they should halt; and now the thing was to make a camping-place as soon as possible. As the night was starlight, the business of putting up the tent was postponed till the next morning; indeed, it was already too dark to select a proper spot. A fire was kindled, a young tree felled for a further supply of fuel, and an hour afterwards the two friends were sleeping beside the blaze, comfortably wrapped in their blankets.

George was the first to awake, next morning; and he could not suppress a cry of pleasure and admiration at the noble landscape that lay spread before him.

High mountains, covered with gigantic pines and firs,

formed the background of the picture ; at their feet a clear woodland stream foamed and gurgled on over bright pebbles and great blocks of quartz ; and farther down, in the direction of the path they had traversed the day before, lay the wide, desolate valley of the Yuba, gleaming in weird beauty in the blue-red morning light. And what a hurrying and bustling scene of work and activity all around !

Wherever the eye turned, it rested on little tents of gay and bright colours, standing forth in picturesque dots, from among the dark green of the bushes ; and everywhere the whole region was alive with human figures ; some busy at the fires, preparing their breakfast, others carrying wood, and others already setting out to begin their day's work. More than one had begun their toil before daybreak, for, from more than one spot the peculiar rustling sound caused by the shaking of the cradles, could be plainly heard.

While George stood looking in high glee at the wonderful panorama, and rejoicing in the bright sunshine that had begun to tip the summits of the pine trees with ruddy light, his friend came up to him, and said with a smile,—

“ Well, my boy, this is a merry kind of life up in the mines, eh ? and from here it looks as if the whole thing were nothing but a joke, and every day Sunday. But when you come down to the stream, and begin to work with pick and spade, you'll find out the dark side of gold-digging. There's no place where the old proverb, “all isn't gold that glitters,” is proved oftener than here.”

“ I'm not afraid of any kind of work,” cried George, briskly. “ Put me to the proof, and you'll see I know how to use my arms.”

"So much the better," said his friend, with a laugh, "for you'll have to work, and no mistake. But now let us think of getting breakfast; and then we'll fix upon our next camping-place, and put up our tent; and then, with God's blessing, we'll get to work."

"But do you know if there's a good place for gold-washing near here?" asked George.

"That's more than any one can know," was the answer. "The whole thing is like a lottery, and depends on luck. But as so many people have settled here, and some of them have, even as I see, built block-huts, there must be *some* gold to be got, at all events; and where others can make something by their work, I hope we shan't quite fail. So now to work, for time's valuable here, and every hour we waste we have to pay for out of our own pockets."

A suitable camping-place was soon found; and as both our travellers thoroughly understood the business they had in hand, their tent was fixed and ready in less than half an hour. The provisions were stowed away within; a kind of couch was made of saddles and blankets, and they were free to begin their labour as gold-washers.

George had some misgivings at the idea of leaving all their property, alone and unwatched, here in the wood; and his recent experiences had been of a kind to justify his doubts respecting the honesty of their neighbours. But his protector declared his fears to be groundless.

"As soon as we have *tied up* the entrance of our tent," he said, "so that the donkey can't come in, we may set our minds at ease respecting our things. Here, in the mines, tying up a tent counts for locking and bolting the door; and I wouldn't advise any man to be caught breaking in. No, my lad, the only fear I have is, that we mayn't be able to keep Musquito out of the tent; for

he's such a determined, desperate, and outrageous thief, that we shall hardly find his equal among the worst vagabonds in the mines."

"But he hasn't stolen anything yet," interposed George, who was anxious to defend his steed's character.

"No; because we haven't given him the slightest opportunity," replied Musquito's master. "Till now we've had little or no store of provisions, and what we had was put by the fire at night, and we slept close beside. But now that we're obliged to have a larger stock, and to leave it alone the whole day long, we shall have to keep a sharp look out to keep him away from it. But he'd best not let me catch him at his tricks!"

While his master was giving him this equivocal character, emphasizing his speech with threatening finger, Musquito stood about ten yards off, chewing at a tall flower-stalk. It really seemed as if he had understood what was said; for he suddenly laid back his ears, drew in his tail, and skulked away with such a guilty look, that George could not help bursting out laughing.

"He understands it well enough," said his master, with a good-humoured look at the delinquent. "He has one good quality, however; he always keeps near the tent—sometimes a little too near—so he's at hand when we want him. But now come. It's early yet, and we may dig a good bit at some likely place. Then you will learn how gold is sought for and found in California."

CHAPTER XV.

HOW GEORGE BECAME A LUSTY GOLD-DIGGER.

FOR the present the cradle was left standing near the tent, as they did not immediately require it. Each of our gold-seekers shouldered a pickaxe and spade; the old man took the tin pan in his left hand; and thus equipped, they proceeded down towards the mountain stream, to seek out some unoccupied spot, where they might begin their labour.

The stream here pursued a very winding course; and wherever they looked down, they could see that the earth had already been dug over in all directions.

"That doesn't look very promising down there," observed George. "There's hardly a bit of turf left in the whole bed of the stream; they've been digging everywhere. If any gold were to be found, they wouldn't have left these spots to go elsewhere."

"Don't you believe it," replied his companion. "Miners are very impatient people; they dig here and there, and if they don't strike the vein of gold at once, they go off and try somewhere else. None of them have much patience."

"The vein?" asked George. "Does the gold lie in veins up in the mountains?"

"Not in *regular* veins, so to speak; but at any rate it has been washed down here in former times out of the mountains; and that's why, in its pure state, it's called alluvial gold. When the stream broke out and rushed

down into the valley, it carried the heavy metal along with it into the narrow bed; but as it sank to the bottom by its own weight, it was deposited in crevices of the wall, or in the soft clay over which the stream ran. In the course of centuries afterwards, fresh earth was washed over the gold, and then plants and grass grew upon it; so now we've got to try and find out the line or stripe in which the gold was washed down the mountain; and this stripe is what we call a vein."

"But if there had been one of those veins here," said George, "surely those who dug before us must have found it out; for there are holes everywhere you look."

"That's true enough, my boy; but you must remember that the gold didn't come down in a straight line, but had to follow the zigzag course of the former stream, which wound and twisted just as this late stream does now. Every watercourse changes its bed in the lapse of time, whether it be the greatest river in the world, or a little bit of a brook;—unless, indeed, it's hemmed in between high rocks. When the stream sets in any direction, it can't fail to bring a lot of stones and gravel along with it. This gets stopped by some projecting rock or other, and increases more and more, until it at last forms a regular bank, and forces the stream aside into a fresh bed. When the bank of sand and gravel has lain dry for some time, grass and plants begin to grow upon it; and by their decay, form mould enough to make the seeds of trees, blown across it by the wind, sprout and grow. In the course of another century it would be impossible to tell that such a spot had perhaps been the deepest part of the river; and you can only tell that such has been the case by digging down till you come to the layer of sand and shingle washed down by the waters.

"Now, as the gold is thus deposited in zigzag lines, a bit here and a bit there, you can see that it's no easy matter to find out the right spot. You may dig four or five holes side by side in the river bed, and yet miss the right place. Then others come after you, sink a hole close by those already dug, and at once find themselves richly rewarded, where their predecessors couldn't get enough to pay their expenses after weeks and weeks of hard work. One can't, in fact, make any sort of calculation as to where the gold really lies. If we *are* to find it, we find it; though others may have been digging for it in vain ever so long. So let's to work; at any rate, we shall get enough to live upon till we get a letter from San Francisco; and if we have any luck at all, we shall make our travelling expenses into the bargain. So now, come on. You'll learn fast enough how to manage; and the place we'll choose to begin upon shall be just where others have been trying before us."

So saying, the old backwoodsman marched sturdily down the incline, and soon fixed upon a place, where, according to his opinion, there was at least a possibility of their finding gold. Here they took to their spades and pickaxes, and began digging without more delay.

It was hard work, for labour of that kind is never light. At first the upper earth, loosened by the recent rains, came up pretty easily, as they could drive their spades well down into it. But when they came a foot or so lower down, the ground began to grow harder and harder, until they had to loosen every shovelful with the pickaxe before it would come off.

George would have liked to search at once for gold among the first spadefuls they threw out; for, like all

novices, he could not get rid of the idea that the gold lay broadcast throughout California, close to the surface; but his companion soon convinced him of his error by goodnaturedly washing out two or three panfuls of earth, in which not a trace of the shining metal could be discovered. Then George lost heart; and when they had dug down six feet or more, and found nothing, he was for giving up the place, and beginning somewhere else; but his experienced companion knew better.

"D'ye see," said he, "you're just like the rest, who want to *find* everywhere, and won't *seek* anywhere. There's nothing to be got yet. We must first get to stiff clay, or to the naked rock, for it's there that the gold lies in almost every case. If we get down to the naked rock, and don't find anything there, why, we may give up with a good conscience, and try somewhere else."

They worked steadily on, digging deeper and deeper, and only stopping for an hour in the middle of the day, to rest from their unusual exertions. It was almost evening, when they came to a clayey soil, of which the old man washed out a panful or two. There was certainly some gold in it, but, as he declared, not enough to pay for washing out. Nevertheless, they threw this earth on a separate heap, and then went on digging till the sun disappeared behind the hills; then they went off to their hut to eat their supper, and to rest after the labours of the day.

They had not taken much notice of their neighbours; but scarcely was their fire lighted, when one of them, an Irishman, appeared before the tent, with a bitter complaint against Musquito.

According to his account, that unprincipled animal had been vagabondizing about among the tents all day, and

seemed totally to despise the sweet mountain grass ; and while the people were busy working down by the stream, he had made his way to one of the canvass establishments, pushed up the cloth with his nose, pulled out the meal-sack that lay close by, and tugged and bitten away at it until he had succeeded in getting his nose into the meal. Thereupon he had feasted on the stolen property to his heart's content, and now stood, about a hundred yards from his master's tent, under a tree, trying to look innocent, in spite of a suspiciously white mouth.

The Irishman had come to require payment for the flour that had been abstracted ; but unfortunately he had not caught the thief in the fact. Musquito's nose certainly looked as if he had lately thrust it into a meal-tub ; but there were no further proofs against him, and therefore old False gravely advised the Irishman to look better after his tent in future. As to compensation, he declared there was no ground for any such claim, inasmuch as there was nothing beyond a *strong suspicion* against the donkey. If he had been caught in the act of stealing, the affair would have been different.

The Irishman grew angry, and began to threaten and rave ; but as his adversary would give no other answer, and several men who came to listen to the controversy, only laughed at his misfortune, he was at last obliged to depart without any redress ; but he swore, with many imprecations, that if he ever caught the rascally thief at his tent again he would put a bullet into him.

Whether it was that Musquito heard this threat, or that the people found another place for their flour, out of the reach of his inquisitive nose, has never been ascertained ; but the fact is certain that he kept away from the Irishman's tent, at least for that night, indemnifying

himself by an attempt on his master's store of flour. His evil design was, however, frustrated by the watchfulness of Hector, who had not forgotten or forgiven the bite Musquito had given him.

It happened in this wise. While the two gold-washers, exhausted by the labours of the day, lay sleeping soundly, Musquito, who had become hungry again, went snuffing round and round the tent till he found out the whereabouts of the flour-sack. The tent formed an obstacle to the fulfilment of his nefarious intentions, as the canvas had been securely fastened down by pegs driven into the earth.

With a perseverance worthy of a better cause, he worked away at this impediment till one of the pegs yielded, and he managed to thrust his nose beneath it. The remaining work would have been easy, for he had soon grasped the sack with his strong teeth, and George and his friend slept far too soundly to be easily disturbed; but not so Hector, who had long understood what kind of character was seeking admittance, and who in consequence had crept close up to the sack, where he lay watching, without giving vent to a growl, or to any other sound. But no sooner did the nose of the unsuspecting Musquito peer forth beneath the canvass wall, than Hector, recognizing it in spite of the darkness, seized it with his teeth, and declined to let go. Musquito, considerably startled at his check, tried to beat a retreat; but Hector held on bravely; and the two made such a disturbance, that the old man and George sprang up from their blankets, and seized their rifles, in the expectation of an attack by burglars at the very least.

In jumping up, George trod upon Hector's leg, and the dog, opening his mouth to howl out his disgust, let

the thief go. Musquito was not slow to take advantage of the opportunity; and wise enough to see the uselessness of complaint, where he had met with ill-usage through his own duplicity, he slunk quietly into the nearest thicket, and when the next morning came, was nowhere to be seen.

The old hunter did not need to *hear* what had occurred; for at daybreak Musquito's footsteps spoke for themselves. As the thievish donkey seemed incorrigible, when flour was concerned, his master determined not to give him another opportunity of getting at it again. So, when they had taken what they wanted out of the sack, he tied it up firmly, fastened it to the end of his lasso, and hung up the sack to the branch of a neighbouring oak, so high that Musquito had no chance of getting at it, and was obliged perforce to be honest.

As soon as they had despatched their breakfast, the two friends went back to their work, and with peculiar pleasure—for they were in a measure to reap to-day what they had sown yesterday; or, in other words, they could now take to washing, whereas till then they had done nothing but throw aside the useless earth.

So to-day they took the cradle with them, and set it up by the stream where they could get plenty of running water. George was set to rock the cradle, as this was the easiest work; and the old backwoodsman—who, in spite of his years and his grey hair, was perfectly strong and sturdy—carried pailfuls of the earth up to be washed. At first, the whole proceeding appeared very strange to George, and his arms ached with the unaccustomed exercise; but in a very short time he had grown used to the work, and rocked away bravely, pouring water on the earth as he did so, to wash it through

the sieve in the cradle, with as much skill as if he had been used to the work all his life.

Tedious and heavy as the occupation of gold-washing may appear, it always has a certain interest and excitement for the operator, because he never knows what he will find. Every pailful of earth he has dug out may conceal a rich treasure which will pay him for all his toil; and if he does not find a prize in one pailful, he fancies it will be in the next. Every hole he digs may contain something valuable; and though he may be deceived again and again, he never gives up the hope of finding elsewhere what he has sought for here in vain. And is not this a picture of human life?

We all work and toil when we have once reached the age at which we have to shift for ourselves. We try for fortune, now at one place, now at another, always hoping to succeed at last. This confidence and trust in a turn of fortune in our favour is one of the best gifts Heaven can bestow upon us. While we are prosperous, we can dispense with it; but when misfortune, trouble, and harassment come upon us, it stands by our side, and holds out a comforting, cheering hand. Hope is our best staff in our pilgrimage through this world; and upon it we support ourselves, when, weary and faint, we are tempted to despair of ever reaching the goal of our wanderings.

George did not set to work with any settled purpose. He had too little experience of the value of money to be very eager for gold. His impulse was more one of curiosity to see if they should really find anything than the true miner's thirst for gold. And when his old friend at last cleared out the cradle, and stooped to ascertain the result of their first attempt, he stood

watching him with folded arms, and with a merry smile on his face.

Old False transferred all the earth that had remained in the sieve into the great tin pan, and went down to the stream to shake down the gold to the bottom of the pan, and throw out the lighter stones, while the fine earth oozed away of itself.

At last the heavy black iron-sand appeared at the bottom of the pan. It is this sand that always sinks, from its weight, with the gold; and among the black mass appeared little yellow grains and flakes, such as George had seen used as money in all transactions of bargain and sale.

So they had really found *gold*—though the quantity was very much below what George had expected to see.

“Why, you see, my lad,” said his friend, who guessed what was passing in the boy’s mind, “you must not expect to wash all we want out of the first cradleful of stuff. We’ve washed thirty pailfuls of earth, and have got about three dollars’ worth of gold. If we find as much in a few more cradle-loads, we shall be earning very decent journeyman’s wages; and, fact is, we must look at digging and washing as just so much journeyman’s work. If, on the average, we don’t get less than this, we can be very well contented; for there are thousands here in California who’d be only too thankful if they could do as much.”

“Then we shall have to dig a long while before we get rich,” observed George, laughing; “for, considering the price we have to pay for all we want, we shall not be able to lay by much.”

“Well, we must save a little,” replied his friend.

"Then we must certainly reckon upon digging more than one hole out of which we shan't get *anything at all*, or at least not enough to be worth the washing out. That's where the chance is. On the other hand, whoever has the luck to dig down on the place where there's a good lot washed down, or still better, where there's a lump, why he pays himself at once for a good deal of trouble and work. It's rather remarkable, though, that here in California the biggest loafers, and those who did the least work of any, have been the luckiest of all, until now. Wherever they put in their spades, they were sure to turn up prizes. But it doesn't benefit them a bit. They get rid of the gold as fast as they wash it out; the grog-shop keepers and gamblers get richer, and they have just to begin again at the beginning."

"We won't be so foolish as that," said George, confidently.

"No; you've begun very wisely," answered False, with a chuckle, "by leaving your whole stock in a gambling tent. That was a good beginning for California."

"But that was not my fault," argued George, "and besides it's a shame that such a worthless fellow not only got off without punishment, but made a profitable business of it. It doesn't seem like justice, that such rascals should be allowed to prowl about in the world bringing honest people into danger."

"My dear young friend," replied the old hunter, gravely; "the ways of God are unsearchable, but he brings everything to a good end at last. Many things happen in this world every day, for which we poor short-sighted mortals can assign no reason, and which appear to us incomprehensible. But in the effects of things we may often see that everything happened for the best.

You are young, George, and have little experience as yet; but if you think of the past, you'll remember many things that seemed misfortunes to you, when they happened, and that afterwards appeared in quite a different light. Much must have turned out for the best, and often the very misfortune was only the beginning of some future benefit."

"Indeed you are right," said George, "and I am ready to allow it. But what good came of the overflow of the Arkansas? Mother and my little sister almost died on our journey, and now I've quite lost them, and can't find them again."

"Yes, my boy," said the old man, "that's true enough, I grant you; but as yet you only see the cause, the dark side; who knows if everything may not turn out for the best,—even this seeming misfortune?"

"But that piece of knavery of the man in the tent at Sacramento? Do you think that will have a good effect?"

"Who can tell?" answered False. "Which of us can see the thread by which God guides and rules our destiny? We must be content to have faith in Him, and believe that whatever things appear to us dark and incomprehensible, He will cause to work together for our good. But now, George," he suddenly broke off; "we must not stand here idle. We have not nearly earned yet what we spent yesterday, and must try to-day. So, at it again,—and perhaps the next cradleful will yield us more than we got from the last."

They went steadily to work again, and only allowed themselves a very short rest in the middle of the day. By the evening, they had washed out gold to the amount of about nine dollars; not a very good wage for two

days' work of two men, considering the prices paid for provisions in California.

Hector did not seem very well pleased with the occupation to which they had devoted themselves. At first he thought it good fun to roam as he liked round the neighbourhood and through the forest. But when he found that his master would not come away from the heap of earth, and that there was nothing going on in the way of hunting or shooting, he soon grew tired of running about, rolled himself into a ball where George had put down his coat, and slept away his time as best he might.

In the evening, when they went back to their tent, Musquito was standing near it, apparently in a very bad humour. It appeared afterwards that he had received two separate thrashings that afternoon, for visiting tents with a felonious purpose, and, moreover, he had vainly attempted to get at the flour-sack in the tree. That he had taken great pains, was manifest from the appearance of the ground, all trampled and trodden down by his hoofs; but all his efforts had been fruitless.

When they reached their tent, they found company there, in the shape of a small tribe of Indians, or rather of two or three families, who had sought out the white people, to beg spirits for the men, and a little bread for the women.

These savages had evidently met with Europeans or Americans pretty frequently; but not by any means with advantage to themselves. Just in proportion as the Indians George had met in the woods seemed honest, self-relying, and proud, so were these on the other hand degraded and importunate. Some of them even showed signs of having partaken largely of brandy.

Both men and women had partly clothed themselves in European garb, wearing whatever they could procure. They seemed to care very little how or where they wore it—it was something strange, and with that they were satisfied.

Whenever people of this kind abandon their national costume, or *no costume*, they always show a predilection for gay and glaring colours. Bright red and yellow are favourite colours among all savage tribes; but their great delight and pride is the possession of *uniforms*. In return for an old blue, or, still better, a red regimental coat, with epaulets, gold lace, and buttons, they will give almost anything; and the man who has obtained possession of such a prize, thinks himself better dressed than a king.

Among this tribe there was to be found a fortunate individual, who had become the possessor of the staring red uniform coat of a drummer of some nation or other; and although the coveted garment was manifestly too short and too tight for him, he strutted about in it as if he had gained a marshal's bâton, and had an army under his command. The gay jacket certainly displayed some very ominous brown stains; the elbows were sadly tattered, and not above half of the original number of brass buttons remained; but what mattered that? The staring red colour shone conspicuously through the bushes, the sun shone brightly on the sham gold facings and buttons; and the companions of the favoured mortal looked at him with mingled envy and admiration.

Besides the uniform coat, which was of such scanty dimensions, that the fellow found it impossible to button it over his great brown chest, he wore a pair of tattered grey trousers, the braces of which he had passed *over* his

coat; his costume was completed by an old straw hat, ornamented with all kinds of feathers, besides a plume, which had once adorned a military shako—the latter article of apparel dangled by a string from the Indian's neck.

The others were dressed, some only in shirts, others only in trousers, and one had nothing but a coat to cover himself withal; and of the women, two had succeeded in obtaining the European female costume. The flaring cotton prints they had probably been wearing for weeks in the woods, were extremely dirty, and in many places torn by the thorns.

The men certainly carried their bows and arrows; for without them they are never seen in the woods: these weapons are the only means they possess of killing game. They all looked starved enough, and greedily devoured the pieces of biscuit that were given them here and there.

The troop presented themselves, in due course, before old False's tent; and when they noticed him take out a bottle of brandy, they begged hard for some. The man in the regimental coat even offered one of his buttons in exchange for a glass; but False refused to give them anything of the kind; he gave them some bread, however, and promised them more if they would carry wood for his fire.

The Indians were quite content with this proposal; but, instead of going for the wood themselves, they were for sending the women. The old hunter would not agree to this, and told them roundly, if they would not work they should have nothing at all. They took this very ill; and the gentleman in uniform stepped forward

and made a long speech. By the time he had done, he felt that he had quite convinced the white man; but old False, though he had listened patiently to all the Indian had to say, shook his head when he stopped, and sent them away; he would have nothing more to do with such rabble.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE STORY OF THE CUNNING INDIAN.

WHEN the red-skins had thus been sent away, old False went into his tent, and brought out the bottle again. He did not drink any more, for he generally lived in a very temperate way, and only took spirits after great corporal exertion; but he held up the bottle against the fading western light in the sky, and shook his head doubtfully once or twice.

"Hum!" he said, at last, "that's funny, too. Have you been at the bottle, George?"

"I?—Certainly not!" replied the boy, with a laugh. "You may trust me for that."

"Well, it's not for the sake of the brandy," resumed False, "for you know I use little enough of it; but Musquito can't have stolen that, and yet somebody has drunk out of this bottle since I last had it in my hands."

"Can any one of the Indians have crept into the tent?" suggested George—"if so, our guns and blankets are not safe up here, and we'd do better to take them down with us when we go to work."

"Nothing of the kind," replied his friend; the "red-skins wouldn't dare to attempt such a thing as that, after all. I never heard of an instance of an Indian thrusting his hand into a tent, though they are ready enough to make free with anything they can pick up *outside* one. I fancy we've to thank one of our neighbours for this favour."

"But they know, much better than even the Indians, how they're sinning against the law, by stealing out of a tent."

"Why," said the old hunter, "there are a good many people who don't exactly think it *stealing* to take a draught of brandy."

"But how could any one know that we had brandy in our tent?" asked George.

"No one could have known it, except the Irishman, who came here grumbling about Musquito. When he stood in front of the tent, the bottle was lying then in its place in the corner,—and he can get at it from outside quite easily, if he only chooses his time well."

"Then it would be better to put it in the middle of the tent, under the blanket," was George's suggestion.

"Certainly," replied False; "and perhaps he would not take the trouble to search for it there; but, first, I'll make sure whether some one is really pilfering; and if so, perhaps I shall find another way to break him of the habit. So don't you seem to know anything about it, my lad. I've made a mark on my bottle here, by which I mean to find out if we've a thirsty soul among our neighbours or not."

"How do you mean to cure him of it?"

"Never mind;—I shall tell you when the time comes."

"What was it," resumed George, after a pause, "that the Indian was telling you just now, with so much vehemence? He kept beating himself on the chest all the time he was speaking."

"Pooh! nonsense!" answered the old man. "He kept talking about his pride, and his dignity as a 'Capitano.' They're an unhappy race of people, those red-

skins ;—first, driven from their hunting-grounds, and deprived of their support ; and then poisoned with brandy by the men who have plundered them. It will not be long, I think, before they've disappeared from the face of the earth ; and yet God gave them a place on it ; and their customs and habits were well enough adapted to the climate in which they lived. It's the gold we find here in their country, that's destroying these poor wretches."

" But even in their natural state," observed George, " the Indian men appear to me to be lazy and listless, letting the squaws do all the work. In the steppes we met several tribes, who had seldom or never had intercourse with white men ; and these, too, let their women work and carry burdens like slaves, while they marched comfortably on, with nothing but a light spear or bow in their hands."

" That's true enough," said the old man ; " and we find the same thing among all savage tribes—at least among all who live by hunting. But there's a good reason for that, and we must not judge such customs by what a civilized nation would do. Not only the Indian himself, but his wife and children also depend chiefly for support upon what he kills with his bow and arrow. In the hunting-grounds, where they live, they may get the chance of a shot at a game animal at any moment ; and if they missed it, they might perhaps wait long enough for a second opportunity. So the hunter, the chief provider of the family, must always be ready and prepared, and may not be burdened with anything that would prevent him from using his limbs freely. Nor must he be too much fatigued, for the hand must not tremble that is to wield the bow or the

musket. So that what appears to us a barbarous and cruel custom, has something like sense in it after all ;—the women, not being able to attend to the chase and provide a subsistence for their families, were made to perform the drudgery. When the lazy, half-tipsy scamps take to playing the grand gentleman, and go begging, instead of hunting, it's a bad state of things for the women. But examples of that kind are to be found everywhere. There are idlers and scamps among all nations, and our free America itself has only too many examples of the sort to show."

"But the Indians might benefit by their intercourse with the whites, instead of only imitating their faults," said George.

"They *might*, but they certainly don't," was the reply. "The reason is chiefly that they generally only come into contact with the most worthless class among the whites. And who are the people who associate most with them, over in the States?—why, the Yankee pedlars and gamblers. The hunters and trappers, five out of every six of whom are rough, savage chaps, also loaf about among them ; and while they learn to cheat from the pedlars and card-players, the hunters and trappers teach them to swear and to drink brandy,—and somehow they prove very apt scholars at both."

"The Indian may be cunning in hunting," said George, laughing ; "but in cheating, I fancy our Yankee dealers would beat him."

"Don't be too sure of that ; I know one or two examples that prove them to have quite respectable talents that way. Now, let us get our supper ready, and then, if you're not too tired, I'll tell you something about the red-skins at home."

"Tired!" said George, "when you're telling stories, I could sit and listen all night long."

"Don't promise too much," said False. "Pick and spade make heavy eyelids, and rocking the cradle all day is no joke either; but we shall see."

George now bustled about to prepare their frugal meal; and afterwards, with the blazing fire burning up before him, old False began to grow talkative.

"Next to the Cherokees," he said, "the Choctaws are the nation who have shown themselves most accessible to real civilization. Capital farms are to be found among them, and that is the best proof a wild tribe can give of being in earnest about quitting its savage customs; for by cultivating the ground they show an intention of taking to *fixed dwelling-places*. So long as a tribe cannot be brought to *settle down*, all teaching on the one hand, and all fair promises on the other, are so much breath thrown away.

"These old Choctaw and Cherokee chiefs begin to see, too, that if they want to keep pace at all with the white men, they must give their sons a good education. So for some time they have been in the habit of sending them to good schools in Louisville and other large towns; and strive hard to keep them there respectably.

"Among the old chiefs there are, moreover, some very rich men, who have received large sums of money, mostly from the Government of the United States, for the purchase of their lands, and who draw a fixed pension every year. Some have the reputation of having Spanish dollars stored up by the sack-load in their houses.

"One of these chiefs had a son in Louisville. The youngster got on well enough with his studies; but he got into bad company, and spent more money than his

father allowed him. The young Indian, fearing his father would be angry if he wrote too often for money, hit upon another plan to satisfy his wants. His father was in the habit of sending him a letter of credit on a mercantile house for 2,000 dollars. What does the young rascal do, but convert the two *oughts* into *nines*, so that he drew 2,990 dollars instead of 2,000. Of course, the affair could not long remain secret. The old man had the bill, with his son's acknowledgment of receipt sent to him, and was not a little astonished to find what a bad use his son had made of his educational advantages. But he paid the sum without grumbling, and only said good-humouredly :

“ ‘Hum ! hum ! I shouldn't have thought my boy had become so much Yankee already.’ ”

“ But a cleverer thing, without being a cheat, was done by an Osage, in Missouri ; and before we turn in, I'll just tell you about it.

“ The Indian, a sturdy, strong-built fellow, had offended a white man, out hunting, though there's no doubt that he was in the right. He had wounded a stag ; the poor thing ran on a little farther, and was finished by the white man, who happened to be close by. Now, according to our hunting laws, the skin belongs to the man who puts the first bullet into an animal. He who shoots it dead, only gets half of the carcass. So the red-skin, on coming up to where the deer lay, took possession of what belonged to him, and the white man was the more angry, because the Indian looked too strong and hearty to stand any nonsense.

“ The Indian, who had already shot a stag, went to the nearest storekeeper, who had set up his shed in the forest, to barter what he had killed for powder and

bullets, and especially whisky and brandy. He happened to go to the same house in which the white man was lodging whom he had offended in the wood. He happened to come home just as the Indian was in the store, and saw that the red-skin had left his fowling-piece leaning against the house.

"That was just what the malicious fellow wanted. Without a moment's pause, he crept up to the piece, and drew out the charge of shot, so that the poor red-skin should miss the next thing he shot at.

"The Indian, meantime, did not lose the opportunity of drinking as much of the 'fire-water' (that's the name they give to spirits of every kind) as he could carry. When he came out, a flock of tame turkeys had just gathered round some maize that had been thrown to them, and were pecking away to their heart's content. The Indian took up his gun, and was going by; but when he saw all those birds collected together, the hunter's blood stirred within him; and, pointing his gun at them, he said, laughing:

"'Me very glad of such shot—out in the woods.'

"The white man no sooner heard that, than it struck him that this would be a capital opportunity, not only to serve the Indian out for what he called his impudence, but also to get something out of him to pay for the deer-skin; so he called out:

"'I'll bet a dollar you don't hit one of them.'

"'I've not got dollar,' answered Tom (for so the Indian was called), 'but old man got otter-skin of mine, big otter-skin, worth dollar and half dollar. You bet dollar and half dollar against it, that I hit not one turkey?'

"'Of course I will,' cried the white fellow; 'here,

I put down my money on this log. If you hit one or more, you take it. If you hit none, your otter-skin's mine.'

" 'Good,' said the Indian ; and he looked to the powder on his gun-lock ; for those fellows still use the old-fashioned guns with flint-locks ; and so do many of our white hunters, for that matter : ' me see who wins.'

"The dealer refused to consent to the trial ; for if the Indian fired at the crowd of turkeys with small shot, he could not fail to kill, or at least to disable, a great number. But the white man winked at him secretly, and pointed to the Indian's gun ; so that the dealer could make a pretty shrewd guess at what was going on. He was perfectly ready, moreover, to join in any trick at an Indian's expense.

"Tom had meanwhile coolly cocked his gun ; and though he was a little unsteady on his feet, he was not nearly drunk enough to miss such an easy aim. The whole flock of turkeys could not be more than twenty yards from him. He let fly among them, and they fluttered up in a great fright, and ran away gabbling in all directions ; but not one of them remained on the field, or even showed the least sign of having been wounded.

"Tom stood like one petrified, staring by turns at his gun, at the turkeys, and at the two men. He could not imagine how it was possible that he had missed.

"His rival, on the other hand, was in ecstasies at the success of his trick. He danced and jumped round the Indian, laughed at the poor thunderstruck fellow, and joked the red-skin about his 'dollar and half dollar.' Poor Tom was very dejected. He reloaded his gun, drew his blanket close about his shoulders, and grumbled out,—

"'Tom too much whiskey—no good. Makes head heavy and hand shake. Tom drink no more whiskey.' And with these words he moved away towards the forest with the heavy deliberate step peculiar to the Indians.

"For the next fortnight the two jokers heard no more of the Indian, though they often laughed at the trick they had played off upon him. At last one day he came along through the wood, with a great bundle of cured skins for sale; and he seemed sober and steady enough. He looked a little gloomy when he caught sight of the white man who had won his otter-skin from him; but he spoke no word on the subject, but only leaned his long single-barrelled gun where he had placed it before, and stalked into the shop.

"The storekeeper followed him in; but the other lingered; and, rendered bold by the success of his former attempt, he resolved to try the scheme once more. So he crept softly up to the gun, drew the charge of shot, without attracting the notice of the Indian, put the gun back in its old place, and then sat down quietly to await the return of the proprietor.

"The turkeys were strutting about before the door, as on the former occasion.

"The Indian made no long delay. This time he had sold all his wares for ready money, and not bartered any for whiskey; and he did not seem inclined for conversation. He seized his gun, shouldered it, and with a short nod turned to go back into the forest.

"But his enemy was not inclined to let him off so cheaply. He called after him, and asked if he did not feel inclined to try his luck again, and take a shot. But the Indian shook his head, and said, coldly,—

"'Tom not got so many dollars. Pale-face give

Indian whiskey, and then he shoot all that come in his way. Very few otters in the river. Otters go away when pale-face comes ; Indian go too. Indian very poor.'

"The cheating loafer, thinking to deceive the Indian again, began to tease him by saying he had drunk as much brandy as he had swallowed a fortnight before, and therefore was not able to hit anything he shot at. The Indian at first did not seem to listen to him ; but at last he appeared to get angry ; and when the white man began again with his 'dollar and half dollar,' he said, shortly,—

"'Good. Here my dollar—one dollar not much—don't mind one dollar.'

"'Oho,' sneered the other, 'if you've such a lot of money that you don't care about one, I'll put down *five*. Will you stake against them ?'

"'That I don't hit one turkey—not one ?' asked the Indian with a crafty look.

"'That's it,' was the answer. 'If you knock over one or more, why, I've lost—that's all.'

"The Indian nodded silently ; and, taking four dollars more from the money he had just received for his furs, he laid down the coins beside his rival's stake, on a neighbouring stump. Then he threw the turkeys a handful of maize from a tub that stood near ; and when they came crowding round to pick up the scattered grain, he stepped back a number of paces, so as not to be too near, cocked his gun, and fired. This time he certainly made up for the failure of his former attempt ; for great was the execution among the unhappy gobblers. Four of them lay dead and stiff ; and two or three among the others, who scuttled away clucking and screaming, had certainly not escaped unscathed.

"The two white men were not a little startled; they had expected a widely different result. The dealer who owned the turkeys now began to grumble, and declared, though he had not made any objection before, that the fowls were *his*, and that the Indian had no right to let fly at them in that way, and must pay the damage. But the red-skin, occupied in reloading his gun, paid no attention to him. When the storekeeper, however, went to where the money was lying, and put out his hand to take it up, the savage sprang forward, and, without saying a word, fastened such an expressive look on the cheat, that he turned quite pale, and drew back his hand as if he had scorched his fingers.

"When the Indian saw that, he became quiet; he coolly dropped the silver coins, one by one, into his bullet-pouch, and shouldered his piece. But before he went away he turned once more to the two confederates, and said good-humouredly,—

"‘S’pose you want shoot once more,—me here again in a week from this day; but’—he continued, coming up in a confidential kind of way to the white hunter, who looked foolish enough by this time,—‘when Indian come to paleface he put *two* charges of shot in his gun. S’pose white man draws one out, Indian have one left for another shot.’ And he waved his hand and went.”

Before George had done laughing at this instance of the red man’s ingenuity, his companion had already wrapped himself in his blanket, and was quickly in the land of dreams.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE ACCIDENT IN THE MINES, AND THE STORY OF THE MONKEY.

THE night passed away without any remarkable occurrence, and early next morning they went again to their work.

The old man and George descended into the pit they had dug, and the experienced gold-seeker showed the boy that they had come to the rock into which the gold had been washed in former years. Wherever the rock lay flat and broad, they might make sure of not finding the remotest trace of the precious metal; but where there were clefts and gaps, it appeared to have wormed itself in, while volcanic ashes, falling upon it at a later period, had securely confined it in its resting-place. The form of the gold seemed to betray the fact that it had been deposited in a molten state. They found it in seed-like bits, often like drops, and frequently, too, in the shape of flattened beans. Here and there it seemed to have run into the interstices of quartz stones, and could be cut out with a knife or other pointed instrument. Still it appeared everywhere only in little scattered grains, and the collecting it was terribly tedious work.

"I can't imagine," George burst out, "why we don't find *more* gold here, considering the reports we used to hear of the thousands of ounces sent away in every ship. A thousand ounces is a very large heap."

"And a very large number of people must work to get

it together," replied his old friend. "If we two only get two ounces in a whole week—and we must make out pretty well to do that,—just fancy how many thousand others are gold-washing like ourselves in the mountains; and there are fresh arrivals every day, coming on by thousands. They can't keep the gold they get—excepting some few who have particular luck. They must pay it away to the storekeepers, and buy themselves what they want in the way of provisions, and clothes, and tools. Then the gold finds its way to San Francisco, to the large commercial houses, and is thence sent off to the States and to Europe in payment for fresh goods wanted here. Where the earnings of so many are concentrated on one point, as is the case here in California, there must, of course, be a great heap of wealth. Look at each bee,—what an insignificant little pellet of honey it carries into the hive, and yet what a mass the whole community will manage to collect during a single summer. Just so it is with the gold. We hear great sums talked of, and never think how many thousands of hands have toiled to collect the weight of gold. We, George, are now among the number of the bees, and if we don't suck our honey out of flowers, but have to dig it out of the rock with pick and spade, we have to show the same industry that the bee displays, and perhaps don't get any more real advantage from it than one of those poor little insects."

"Perhaps if we were to try another spot," suggested George, "we should find more."

"That's the true gold-washer's mania," answered False with a laugh. "That's the hope they all cling to; and if we do the same, perhaps we may make something out of it, after all. Besides, it seems to me there's not much

more to be got where we're trying now. So, when we've washed out this cradleful, we'll begin another hole hard by."

By mid-day they had finished their task, and climbed out of the pit to eat their dinner; but they had not got half way up the hill, and had only just reached the point from which their tent became visible, when the old man suddenly called out,—

"Plague take the cunning rascal!" and pointed upwards as he spoke.

George could not make out at first what he meant; but when he looked in the direction indicated, he recognized their skittish retainer, Musquito, engaged in a very peculiar fashion.

On the preceding day, the covetous donkey had failed, in spite of repeated efforts, in his attempts on the meal-bag; but he had not by any means given the matter up; on the contrary, he had continued hovering about in the neighbourhood of the unattainable prize. To-day, the bag had been by mistake hung a little lower, or perhaps it had sunk slightly through its own weight. Be that as it may, the donkey had actually succeeded in reaching the lower end of the sack with his teeth.

Just at that critical moment, the two friends came in sight. But when George prepared to rush forward to the rescue of their flour-sack, old False held him back, and said with a dry chuckle,—

"Let him be for a moment; I'm rather curious to see how Musquito will get out of the scrape."

"He'll tear down the sack," cried George.

"No, he can't do that," was the answer. "I tied it too securely for that—just see what he's doing."

Musquito appeared to be employing himself with great

zeal, but without any practical result; for though he tugged at one corner of the sack with might and main, the elastic bough to which it was fastened always jerked it up again, so that the coveted treat kept bobbing up and down, in unattainable yet tantalizing proximity to the open mouth of the burglarious donkey.

"Does n't he look as if he was playing at ball with it?" said the old man with a laugh; "but clever as he is in general, I fancy he'll have nothing but his trouble for his pains, as we say in the States."

Musquito seemed to be of the same opinion; for though entirely unaware of his master's approach, he suddenly stopped, and remained gazing at the swaying bag, until its oscillations gradually ceased, and it hung quite motionless.

"He'll either give it up, or begin the same game again," whispered George. "If he had sense enough he might gnaw the rope asunder, and the bag would tumble down of itself."

"If he had human reason, you might expect him to do that," said the American; "but no, he's got no other plan in his head, I'm sure. D'ye see, he's at the corner again."

"He'll pull it down again directly," observed George.

Musquito had indeed seized hold of the lower end of the bag; but he held it in his mouth quite so that it scarcely swung at all; and he himself remained perfectly motionless.

The two gold-washers stood still for almost ten minutes waiting to see what he would do next.

"I positively think he's gone to sleep," cried the first; "he does not stir a limb."

"I'll tell you what he's doing," exclaimed the second.



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Old False's Mule helping himself to the flour. P. 220.

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1. The first group of people who are interested in the results of the study are the researchers themselves. They want to know if the study was successful in achieving its objectives and if the results are consistent with their expectations.

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suddenly ; " the rascal's *swallowing*. He's bitten the sack right through, and is letting the meal run quietly into his mouth, and down his throat. Yoho, Musquito ! wait a bit, you rascal ! Here, Hector, seize him, boy, seize him ! "

Hector did not wait to hear the command repeated. He had long ago seen what the two were looking at, and had himself been watching the thievish donkey with ears and tail erect. No sooner did he hear the word of command, and see how his master ran towards the tent, than he rushed away, without uttering a sound, and made straight up to Musquito.

The wily donkey had no idea of waiting to bear the brunt of his master's anger. Scarcely did he hear the first threatening shout, before he was in full retreat, galloping away along the side of the hill. Hector, not satisfied with simply driving him away, pursued him at full speed, and had soon overtaken him. When Musquito heard the dog panting along behind him, he first turned round, laid back his ears, and showed his teeth ; and then, trusting more to his hind legs, he suddenly faced about again, and struck out so sharply and cleverly at his pursuer, that Hector was obliged to keep at a very respectful distance.

George saw that his old friend had been quite warranted in his suspicion ; for no sooner did Musquito quit his hold of the sack, than the meal came running out in a white stream. George ran up the hill as fast as his feet would carry him, to save as much of their store as possible. When he had once got a firm hold of the torn corner, the leak was stopped, and his companion quickly lowered the sack, that they might tie up the hole, and collect what they could of the scattered flour.

This was not the only trick Musquito had played them; for when they came to the tent, they saw that one of the sacks had been pulled out, and the one, moreover, in which they had put dried apples and onions together. The dainty thief had left the onions untouched, very neatly picking out the apples from among them.

George laughed; but his old companion, as if to convince himself whether this had been the whole extent of their loss, brought forth his brandy-bottle from its corner, held it up so as to show the mark he had made on the label pasted outside, and cried, after examining it for a moment,—

“Deuce take all pilferers. Musquito and the rest!”

“Is some of the brandy really gone?” asked George, incredulously.

“Look yourself and see,” answered False; “here is the mark I made, and the brandy doesn’t nearly come up to it. There’s a good pull missing: as much as a man can swallow, without stopping to take breath.”

“Well, that’s strange, upon my word,” said the boy.

“I don’t care a button about the brandy,” said old False; “the fellow who’s so desperately fond of it, is welcome enough to that; but that the scamp should dare to break into a tent, that’s what annoys me; and we must not let him off unpunished.”

“That’s easily said,” replied George, with a laugh; “but the question is still—*who was it?* You might ask through the whole place, from tent to tent, and no one would know a word about it.”

“I know as well as you do,” grumbled False, “that I should get precious little satisfaction from asking; and I haven’t any such intention. I shall find it out in another way. I don’t suppose our unknown guest will

come twice in one day—that would be carrying his impudence a little too far; but it's better to be on the safe side, and we'll provide for the chance. Then he may come as soon as he likes."

Without another word, he took the bottle, poured himself out a glassful, and then brought out a tin case, in which he kept a few drugs and powders, needles and thread, and other small matters. From this case he produced a paper containing a white powder, and after looking carefully round to see that no one was passing by at the moment, poured the powder into the bottle.

"For Heaven's sake!" cried George, catching at his arm, "you surely don't mean to *poison* the poor fellow? He certainly has not deserved death, though he has stolen a glass or two of brandy!"

"Nonsense!" growled False, pushing him aside. "Take care what you're about. You'll make me spill the whole affair—let me alone."

"But if he drinks that?"

"Then he'll feel most confoundedly sick," said the old man with a grin; "and serve him right, too. He won't come to any harm. The most it will do, will be to make him feel as if he was on the sea, and the wind blowing; for the powder's nothing more nor less than tartar emetic."

"Well, that won't hurt him," said George laughing. "But he'll taste it as soon as he touches the brandy."

"Not he; it dissolves splendidly—and if he really should taste something strange in the brandy, the mischief will have been done already. At any rate he can't *smell* it. But that rascally Musquito, too. It was fortunate that we came up at the decisive moment; for the scamp would first have stuffed himself full, and then let the rest run out."

"But the neighbours would certainly have noticed it, and driven him away," said George.

"Driven him away?" repeated the old man, shaking his head doubtfully. "I reckon they wouldn't have taken the trouble. Besides, all men have a certain knack of being pleased when any misfortune, with a spice of fun in it, happens to their friends; and they're much more likely to stand and laugh than to pity the loser, or to try and prevent the mishap. You'll find that this is true, as you get older, and the chances are, that we two are not a bit better in this respect than our neighbours. Did you ever see any one trip up and tumble down, without feeling inclined to laugh? Did you ever see a man running after his hat or cap in a high wind, without feeling disappointed when he caught it?—I fancy not. We can't help being amused at whatever strikes us in a comic light, and sometimes it goes so far, that we would rather appear in a really wrong light, than in a ridiculous one. If we see anything very funny, even if it brings damage and loss to one of our neighbours, we are very seldom good-natured enough to spoil our own enjoyment for his benefit. We let things occur that we might prevent with a word, and though we may be sorry for it afterwards, we can't help laughing at the time. I'll tell you an instance of the fact—though I dare say you have experienced it often enough yourself.

"I was staying at St. Louis. I had gone there to pay a short visit to some friends. Just opposite to us there lived a German shoemaker, an industrious, good-humoured chap, whom we all liked well enough. He had a good many old-fashioned German ways about him. He slept every night on a frightful great feather-bed,

and covered himself over with another, so that he was quite lost among the pillows; and then he always smoked out of a pipe as long as himself, and wore glass goggles, and altogether was as strange a fish as you would wish to see.

"He was unmarried, and lived all alone in a little house; but he kept a whole school of cats and dogs, and little birds, and other pets; and at last he had bought a monkey from the steward of a New Orleans steamer; and played all kinds of tricks with the little beast. The monkey could take all sorts of liberties with him, except go near his feather-bed; for the shoemaker set tremendous store by it. The monkey liked the snug warm nest, for all that; and used to creep into the bed at first, and go to sleep; but he got so many thrashings, that at last he gave it up.

"One day the cobbler was sitting in his workshop, stitching away at a terrible big pair of boots he was making for one of his countrymen. We in the opposite house happened to have nothing particular to do, and were sitting at the open window smoking. Suddenly we caught sight of the monkey, up in the bedroom, the windows of which were open; and we saw him jumping about by the feather-beds, looking as if he wanted to creep in between them. The thrashings he had received must have been too fresh in his memory, though, and he didn't dare, but jumped out again on to the window-sill, in the sunlight. It was too hard lying there for him, and all at once he ran back again, and soon reappeared, lugging along a great thick pillow; this he pulled up on to the sill, and laid himself down comfortably upon it. But after a little time he got tired of lying still on the warm cushion, and began looking round for amuse-

ment. So presently he began pulling and tugging at the pillow, till he either discovered a hole, or pulled out a thread himself, and made one; and, as it happened, a feather came out in his paw, and flew away as soon as he opened his fingers. The wind caught it, and bore it upwards; and the monkey, delighted with the sport, watched the feather till it had floated quite out of sight. He evidently thought it good fun; and as soon as the first feather was gone, he drew out another; and when once he had found out the fact that he could blow them away, with his breath from between his fingers, his ardour seemed to double. One feather at a time was not enough for him now; he had soon widened the hole so much that he could thrust the whole of his little fist into the cavity, and lugging out a pawful each time, he sent them flying with a face of such intense gravity, that it was enough to make one die with laughing.

"We knew well enough that the poor shoemaker's bed was being spoiled, while he was working away so diligently below. But the thought that the master was working away so innocently downstairs while the monkey blew one handful of feathers after another out of the window, seemed to make the incident more comic than ever; and at last we could contain ourselves no longer, but burst into a general roar of laughter. Still it never occurred to one of us to warn the shoemaker of the damage his monkey was doing.

"At last the cobbler heard us laughing; and he could not help noticing how often we looked at his house. Still he did not appear to trouble himself about it, but seemed quite absorbed in the completion of the big boots; till at length the wind, with more consideration than his neighbours had shown, sent a whole cargo of feathers

whirling into his workshop. To jump up from his bench and rush upstairs was the work of a moment; and three seconds afterwards we saw him burst into the bedroom where the monkey was. But master Jacko twined himself nimbly round the window-post, and so got on the roof; and when the angry cobbler looked up at him, baffled and unable to follow, he danced to and fro gleefully, and chattered and grinned at his master."

While George was still laughing at this comical anecdote, the old man raked up the fire; and after despatching their meal, they went back to their work. First, however, they took the precaution of hanging the flour-bag so high that Musquito, who was, moreover, nowhere to be seen, could scarcely hope to reach it a second time by the stratagem he had once successfully employed.

They were hard at work in the valley with pickaxe and shovel, when two or three parties passed from the little gold-diggers' colony with loaded mules. A couple of men lingered behind the rest, and asked if they found enough to make the work pay.

"We manage to make out pretty well," replied the old backwoodsman. "But you don't look satisfied."

"Well, we didn't do so badly," said one of the men; "but we're going to try somewhere else."

"And where are you going?" asked George.

"Down south," was the abrupt and unsatisfactory reply; and the two men passed on.

"Let that be a warning to you, George," said old False, when they had gone; "and in future never ask a travelling gold-washer where he's going. In the first place, the people hardly ever know it themselves, and almost always go haphazard from one place to another, as we ourselves have done; and even if they know where

they're going, you may be very sure they won't tell you. Here in the mines, just as in the towns, there are always reports going about of new spots that have yielded great prizes ; and among the thousands of discontented men who are to be found everywhere, each one wants to be the first to secure a good place for himself. But every other person travelling the same way would be an impediment to him ; and so no one cares to betray his destination to another ; if they did tell you the name of any place, you might be sure it's the last one they intend to visit."

"But all men don't deceive you in that way," said George.

"My good young friend," answered his protector, "at your age it would be a sad thing if you hadn't confidence in human nature. But as you grow older, you'll make many bitter experiences. Gold, in particular, is a thing that dazzles the world, and makes people, who but for its temptation would be open and honest, do much worse things than deceive you about where they're going. Gain governs the world, unfortunately ; and instead of thinking how they may do their neighbours a good turn, most people are always planning how they can grub and scrape together a few cents more for themselves.

"We mustn't altogether condemn selfishness, either, for it comes from the feeling of self-preservation which God has implanted in every breast, and without which no one would care to exert himself much or work hard. A little care for self is, therefore, not to be blamed ; we must have a certain respect for ourselves, for if we haven't, other people won't think much of us either. But this self-respect mustn't degenerate into selfishness, for then it becomes the worst quality a man can have about him, and the beginning of a number of vices, such as avarice,

covetousness, hard-heartedness, and a whole lot more—but what's that—why are all the folks running away together?"

"Something must have happened!" cried George, and he dropped his spade, and seized his jacket.

"Stay where you are, my lad," said his friend. "Most likely it's a fight between two tipsy loafers, and the farther we stay away from it the better."

"Perhaps another grizzly bear has fallen into a pit," said George, with a laugh.

"That's not likely to happen twice," replied the old hunter; "but I really think I heard some one calling for help!"

"So I thought, too. Perhaps some accident has happened, after all. Hadn't we better go?"

"At least we may go and hear what's up, and see if we're wanted; if it's nothing particular, we can go back directly," said old False.

"Shall I jump up to the tent and bring my rifle?" asked George.

"Why in the world should you do that?" answered his friend. "Upon my word, I fancy you've made up your mind for another grizzly bear. No, never mind your gun, but run on before. I'll stay and make our gold all safe—it's not much; but still, it's not worth while washing it out for other people."

George immediately set off along the valley at full speed. "What's the matter? What has happened?" he cried out to two or three men whom he overtook.

"Don't know," was the answer; "but all the others are running that way. May-be it's some one buried."

Buried! George could not understand what the men meant; but the place to which all were hurrying

was not far off—and running along the margin of the ravine, so as to avoid the numerous holes and pits, he soon reached it.

“What has happened here?” he inquired breathlessly of one of the bystanders.

“The bank has given way and buried two men,” was was the reply.

“Lord help us! but can nothing be done for them?”

“They’re doing all they can—keep back, there’s no room for any more—they’re shovelling away as hard as they can—” answered the man.

George pushed his way through the crowd till he came close to the pit, in which five or six men were standing shovelling out the earth that had fallen in in a large mass, with as frantic a haste as if their own lives depended on their speed. Among the spectators was a man who had been working in the same hole. He was an American, and the perspiration was streaming from his face, for he had only just been relieved by another eager workman.

“I warned Jones over and over again this morning,” he exclaimed, “but he wouldn’t listen, and kept digging deeper and deeper into the side of the pit. There was gold in it, and he thought to save us the trouble of clearing away all the earth above. Now the two poor fellows are buried under it, and he’s dug a grave for himself. Poor Jones!”


In the mean time, the men in the pit worked diligently on. When any one became tired, he had only to raise his head, and an eager hand was stretched out to seize the spade from his grasp, and continue the work. Suddenly one of the labourers came upon something soft—he turned over the earth carefully, and uncovered the foot of one of the unfortunates. The remaining earth was

now speedily removed from the sufferer; and as he lay in a slanting position, so that his head did not come quite beneath the heaviest mass, the task was soon accomplished. No sooner was he freed from the burden that had pressed so heavily on him, than a few of the spectators took him up and carried him out of the pit into the sunlight, to begin their attempts at reviving him, while the others continued their efforts with unwearied zeal to disinter his fellow-sufferer.

At last the second man had been found, too. The fall of the mass of earth had surprised him at a moment when he must have been stooping with his head *under* the bank, and the whole mass had to be removed before they could get him out.

In the mean time a joyful exclamation went from mouth to mouth, that the first of the two men had shown signs of life and; the rough and generally impassive gold-washers now vied with each other in their efforts to fan the flickering flame of returning consciousness. On the second victim all their care was thrown away; he had lain too long under the heavy earth, and had probably been dead some time when they reached him; nevertheless, no means were left untried to restore him to life—but he was dead and gone.

When George's old friend heard what had taken place, he ran quickly to the tent, and brought some *sal volatile*, out of his store of medicines. With this specific he hastened back to the first sufferer, who still lay in a senseless condition; and under his superintendence, attempts at resuscitation were carried on with such vigour and success, that before an hour had elapsed, they had the consolation of seeing the poor man restored to consciousness, and out of all immediate danger.



The dead man was carried up to his tent, from whence he was to be carried to his grave the next day.

This occurrence had marred the industry of the whole colony for the rest of the day ; and the miners assembled in various groups, mostly in the vicinity of the grogtents, to talk over the unhappy accident, and to relate similar events they had experienced in past times. It is nearly always so in a community—when one member has broken his arm or leg, or met with any accident, there are always twenty people ready with stories of a similar mishap that has befallen them or their friends. The most harrowing tales are told ; and the sufferer has to endure, besides the pain of his wound, the excitement caused by all the most terrible pictures the memories or imaginations of his friends can supply.

So it was also here : and old False, who had attended to the poor sufferer as well as he could, kept exhorting the people to hold their tongues ; but, as soon as he had enforced silence, some new neighbour would look in with a tale more horrible than all the rest. When he saw that all his efforts were vain, old False at last left the tent in disgust, and walked home with George, abandoning the poor man to the tender mercies of his loquacious comrades.

CHAPTER XVIII.

HOW MR. FALSE PLAYED THE DOCTOR ; AND HOW GEORGE
FOUND, NOT ONLY SOAP, BUT GOLD.

No sooner had they arrived at their canvas dwelling, than the old American at once proceeded to inspect the medicated brandy-bottle. Scarcely had he taken it in his hand, when he exclaimed,—

“ Well, if that ’s not too bad ! Just see here, George ! the scamp has been at our brandy again, already ; and, most likely, chose the time when we were all busy about that poor fellow yonder. Wasn’t I right when I said the Irishman was the thief ? When I came running up to get the *sal volatile*, I saw him sneaking away among the trees, for all the world like Musquito when he’s been caught thieving. Most certainly he’s been at it again ; and if I’d come ten minutes sooner, I should have caught him in the act ! ”

“ And has he drunk any of it ? ” asked George, eagerly.

“ Hasn’t he ? Just look here ; there’s another glass missing since to-day at dinner. Terribly thirsty the rascal must have been ! It’s a pity, though, that we shan’t know how it agreed with him ; for he’s safe to keep in the forest, out of the way, as soon as he finds there’s something wrong, and won’t come back till he gets better. But he’ll look pale enough to-morrow, I can tell him—and I don’t doubt he’s queer in his inside just now.”

"Hallo, gentlemen," cried a voice outside the tent, just as the old man was putting aside the bottle.

"Hallo, sir," answered False, pushing aside the canvas, and thrusting out his head—"what do you wish?"

The visitor was a gold-washer whom they had seen more than once as they went to and fro,—but they knew nothing of him.

"Oh," said the man, "I noticed just now that you've got some doctor's stuff with you, and know how to use it. May I ask if you're a doctor?"

"Well, not that exactly," answered the old hunter, with a smile; "but when a man has lived to be as old as I am, he often knows enough about drugs to be able to help a friend at a pinch. Are you ill?"

"No, sir," answered the man; "it's not me, but one of my fellow-lodgers has been taken at once in such a queer way, that we don't know what's the matter with him. To-day at dinner he was as well as could be, and ate like a bear; and now he feels so dreadfully bad, and has horrid pains in his chest and stomach—almost as if he had been *poisoned*!"

"Has he though?" cried the old man; and turning rapidly, he cast a quizzical look at George,—but his face was quite grave when he turned again to the stranger, and said quietly,—“but you don't think it a serious case, do you? Most likely he has overeaten himself.”

"Why, no, it's not that," said the other. "I don't half like the look of the thing. He keeps heaving and groaning as if he were sick, though it doesn't come to that; and between whiles he gasps and moans enough to soften a stone. I wanted to run over to you more than a quarter of an hour ago, for our tent doesn't stand far off. But when I offered to come, he wouldn't have

it on any account, and declared he would be better in a little while. But since then he has kept growing worse and worse, and now he's lying at full length in the tent, the crayter, with the big drops pouring off his face like water; and he keeps on groaning and moaning that he's kilt entirely, and must die like a dog."

"But where could he have got the poison from?" asked False, without moving a muscle of his face.

"Faith, and that's just what we can't make out," replied the stranger, whose accent betokened him to be a native of the "Green Isle"—"unless he's been picking up some poisonous berries or other out in the plaguey wood. Won't you go over with me? May-be you may do the poor boy some good, and we'll be glad to make it worth your while."

In California no man expected that another would do anything without pay—and particularly a doctor.

"Well, we'll see about the pay afterwards," said old False, smiling. "At any rate, I'll have a look at your friend; but whether I can do anything for him, is another question. Didn't he say anything that makes you suspect what made him so ill?"

"Not a word—we can't get him to speak, anyhow. Can't make out what ails him."

"Well, well—we shall see," said the old hunter. "You may go with us, George. I'll put something in my pocket here, that perhaps will do him some good, or help him to get rid of his pain."

So saying, he put a little bottle and a couple of powders into his pocket, and beckoned to the boy; and they followed their conductor into a tent some two hundred paces distant.

There they found the very man whom old False had

seen walking about in perfect health among the tents, not two hours before; he was writhing like a worm on the ground, and kept on moaning out, that he should die like a dog. Directly he saw who the visitor was, he gave a start of terror. He seemed to want to speak, but did not dare; and at last turned his back on the new-comer, and writhed about in greater pain than ever.

His companions now came up to the old man, told him how their comrade had suddenly been taken ill, in a most inexplicable manner, and begged him to do anything he could towards giving him ease; for it was out of the question to look for a regular doctor.

"He must have got hold of some poison, somewhere or other," said one, when the old man had vainly endeavoured to get some kind of answer to his questions from the sufferer. "I can't make it out, any other way."

"But where can he have got it?" asked old False. "I certainly have some poison in my tent, and deadly poison too; for any one who drinks it, and don't take the antidote pretty quickly, will be a corpse soon. But he can't get any of the antidote, for it isn't likely any one would carry it about with him."

"You say you have poison in your tent?" asked one of the men. "What do you keep it for?"

"Embrocation for the lumbago," answered the doctor. "But it's my notion your friend has just overeaten himself. Let him alone for to-night. He'll be better to-morrow." So saying, he turned away, and was about to leave the tent, when suddenly the sick man made a great effort, and rose. He looked deadly pale; the perspiration stood in huge beads on his forehead, and his eyes were deeply sunk in his head.

"Sir, sir," he called out to the retreating visitor, and

it was evident he could hardly get the words out of his mouth ; " can I speak to you a minute, alone ? "

" Yes, friend, why not ? Come out with me in front of the tent."

The poor fellow dragged himself up ; and leaning on the old American's arm, he crawled slowly from the tent, towards a thicket not far off, where the Irishman threw himself down under a tree. There they conversed secretly together for a few minutes, and the American took a powder out of his pocket, came and asked for some water to mix it in, and administered it to the sufferer.

" So," he said, as the sick man swallowed it eagerly, " it was high time you took it. You'll feel worse than you do now for a little while, but then you'll get better, and then the danger's past. I'll look in for a minute after dark, and see how you are."

He then went back to the tent, and reassured the little community there, who could not imagine what the two had had to settle so secretly—and then he proceeded with George to his own domicile.

" Had he really been at the brandy ? " the boy inquired of his companion, when they had left the Irishman's tent behind them.

" Of course he had," answered False, laughing. " But he wouldn't have confessed it, if I hadn't told him about the strong poison. Then his fears got the better of him, and under the trees he begged mortal hard that I shouldn't tell the others anything about it. I promised him I would not, because the poor chap has suffered enough, anyhow."

" Yes, poor fellow. I suppose he took a little too much ? "

" Not a bit of it. He didn't take enough. The emetic

wasn't strong enough to work, or else he'd have been well again in an hour; but being weak, the stuff only made him feel horribly queer. I've given him a good dose of the same kind of thing, and he'll be all right again in no time."

The old man was right. When he looked in, before they went to bed, to ask how the patient was going on, they told the doctor, for so they insisted on calling him, that he was in his blanket fast asleep. The next morning he was on his feet again, though he still looked a little pale. But whenever he met old False, he always cast down his eyes in a very sheepish manner, and never ventured near the old American's tent. The brandy-bottle was safe from his depredations for ever after.

Next morning the poor man was buried, who had met his death the day before. His companion had quite recovered his strength. But as soon as the burial was over, no one said anything more about the event, or even seemed to think of it, excepting perhaps the few who had been the dead man's companions in his tent. After all they were strangers who were associated together here; and whether one more or less were taken from their circle, no one cared.

Our two friends meanwhile continued their gold-washing operations, not exactly with a bad result, but with very mediocre success; and more than once the old man made inquiries whether there were any letters for him at the neighbouring mining towns; but each time in vain.

At any rate they earned amply sufficient for all their wants, even if they could not lay much aside; and the boy highly enjoyed the miner's life, with all its novelty. The older partner too, seemed quite at home; and, in spite of his rough manners, showed so much affection

towards George, that the poor friendless boy could not sufficiently thank the Providence that had sent him this kind protector, just at the time when he had lost his parents' care.

People who lead a gipsy life have to do without many comforts and luxuries which we who live in civilized society think absolutely necessary to existence. But once embarked in such a career, they soon grow accustomed to their position; for, after all, it is habit that makes us able to dispense with a thing, or renders it necessary to us.

Their hunting prospects looked cloudy enough. There were too many people wandering about in the woods, in search of new places for gold-washing; and where the deer are continually disturbed they seldom stay, but quickly retire to more secluded haunts. Only once old False succeeded in shooting a stag. If they could hunt but little, they had, on the other hand, plenty of fruit for the gathering; for instance, the cherries already mentioned, and plenty of hazle-nuts, and a kind of gooseberry. *Sugar*, too, was found growing on the trees, on a tree of the pine tribe, in fact, and in a very strange way. Tall, splendid pine-trees, with fruit nine or ten inches long, exuded the sweet juice wherever they were decayed, or had been injured. At such places, and particularly wherever the tree had been touched by fire, there, under the softened bark, a quantity of thick white sugar was to be found, with the bitter gum dropping out close beside it. They gathered this sugar, and used it for sweetening their tea and coffee.

The trees altogether were here on a magnificent scale. The sugar-pines were all much more than one hundred and fifty feet in height; but the trees that flourished

most luxuriantly of all were some of the *taxus* or yew kind, called, in California, "red wood." The leaves are like those of the tree called *Arbor vitæ*, and are evergreen. The beautiful bark has a red tinge; and the whole tree, with its gigantic height, has a magnificent effect. Among the mountains, and particularly in one spot, south-south-east of Sacramento, trees are to be found from three hundred to four hundred feet in height; while here at home a tree of one hundred to one hundred and twenty feet is already considered as a giant.

This colossal genus of pines has received the name of *Washingtonia gigantea*—a most appropriate cognomen; for one of them has been broken off, and the "stump" left in the ground still measures three hundred feet in height, and is fourteen feet in diameter at its upper extremity. What a thickness, three hundred feet above the ground! The entire tree is calculated to have been four hundred and fifty feet high. Others of these trees are ninety feet in circumference, which gives them a diameter of thirty feet. There are woodland giants!

Though the region where our friends were working could not boast of such gigantic specimens, there were very good-sized trees to be seen—many of them two hundred and fifty feet high.

The vegetable kingdom offered another curiosity to George, the existence of which he certainly would never have suspected. They had not been long in the mines before he set about washing the few shirts he possessed, but tried in vain to procure soap. Accustomed by his parents to cleanliness from his earliest youth, he had contracted that valuable habit, and was just about to scour out his linen with river-sand—a process which would scarcely have been favourable to its durability, when his

old friend came up, and stood watching his operations with a smile on his face.

"Why don't you use soap?" he inquired at last.

"Soap!" answered George. "How can I use it, when I can't get any? I don't think it's to be had in the whole colony, if we were to pay for it with its weight in gold."

"Indeed!" said the old man gravely. "You don't say so!"

"I've been in every store in the place, and can't get any," said George.

"You can't get any?"

"Not a single cake."

"I don't wonder at it," observed False with a chuckle. "Why should they take the trouble to bring any when it grows here of itself?"

"I was speaking of *soap*," said George.

"Well, yes,—soap; and there's a big bit lying close by you."

"By me!" repeated George, looking round him with an incredulous stare. "I don't see anything."

"Well, you're not blind either, in a general way; and yet you can't see the soap that's standing close up beside you, six or seven feet into the air. That's curious enough, too."

George looked up, but could make out nothing further than a number of slender plant-stalks, with bags of seeds growing on them.

"Do you mean these?" he asked doubtfully.

"Most decidedly I do."

"And you call that soap?"

"Pull one of them up out of the ground—root and all."

That was no easy task. George tried his best ; but the ground was rather hard, and the root grew firmly. At last his friend came to his assistance, loosened the earth a little with his knife, and brought out a bulbous root, like an onion, as large as a man's fist.

"There," he said ; "with this you can wash what you like."

"With that onion ?" cried George, laughing.

The old American did not deign to enter into further explanation, but tucked up his sleeves, broke off the long stem from the onion, which he rinsed in the water, and then beat it vigorously on the nearest stone. This loosened the fibres ; and dipping the linen into the water, he had no sooner rubbed it with the onion, than it became covered with a thick foam, which, if it was not soap foam, certainly answered the same purpose in cleaning the linen ; and then the old backwoodsman informed his young friend that the Mexicans and Californians seldom use anything but this root in washing their clothes. Though they have all the materials at hand for the manufacture of soap, they always eschew a labour which would be quite gratuitous and profitless.

"To think that I should have been sitting down by the soap, and never have known it was near," cried George, laughing.

"My dear young friend," answered his protector, "that happens often enough in the world, and to wiser people than you or I. There are thousands of secrets in nature only waiting for some one to find them out ; and though many have studied hard, there's plenty left for others to do. God has endowed this beautiful earth with such unspeakable wealth, that we don't require to turn to its great wonders to have our hearts filled with awe and

with thankfulness. The smallest thing we look at is wonderful; and a man must have a very small mind if he would boast of human works in comparison with those of nature!"

"And yet there are many bad men on this beautiful earth," said George.

"They carry their punishment about with them," answered the old man, in a serious tone. "It's a kind of curse for them, not being able to look freely up to the blue sky; and let them get as much wealth as they will—what is it all compared with the peace of a quiet heart! While the bad man sees an enemy or a traitor in every one he meets, grudges every happy man his happiness, and still goes about with a sort of secret feeling that there is a God above, who will call him to account at last, though he strives to blind himself to the fact, the good man goes on his way in peace. He can look every one boldly in the face; he is not conscious of having played false, or committed any evil, and therefore need not fear discovery and punishment."

As they were talking thus, a man came down into the valley. He carried on his shoulder a pickaxe, a spade, and a blanket, and an iron pot dangled at his side. He was still a good distance from them when George recognized him, and exclaimed,—

"Why, that is the very man whom I begged to come to my parents' assistance; but he wanted money, and I had none to give him. If he had only helped me, I should not have missed my parents at all."

"Oh, *that's* the fellow, is he?" said the old man, with a sharp glance at the new-comer; "but I thought you told me he had a waggon, and his family were with him."

"They certainly were," answered George. "Perhaps

they're somewhere in the mountains, not far off, and he's come on in advance alone."

The man had now approached near enough to speak to them, which he did, with a rather short and crusty greeting; but on recognizing the lad, he cried out briskly, "Hallo, George, how do *you* come here—and at work—gold-washing already? How did your old man get out of the snow?"

"That I have never been able to find out until this hour, Mr. Hoslick," answered the boy, who could not force himself to be friendly to this man. "As you refused to help me, I had to look about in the forest for aid, by which I lost time, and I've never found my parents again."

"Ah! did you?" said Mr. Hoslick, without seeming to take the implied rebuke much to heart. "Well, you'll fall in with them again some day; besides, in California, every one does better working on his own hook. If one finds anything, one hasn't got to divide it with any one, and if one doesn't, that's nobody's business. By the way, I had horrid ill luck on the very day I saw you," he continued, with an oath. "I could swear for half an hour at the very remembrance of it! Plague take all California, say I!"

"Did anything happen to your family?" asked George hastily, for his thoughts flew back to the pretty friendly girl, who would so gladly have helped him if she had dared.

"My family—why, no," grumbled the man; "but it was almost worse—it was my oxen and my waggon that went to smash. I must have got into the wrong valley, somehow, for it was shut in by high walls of rock; and when I tried to force a way along one of them, the

waggon turned over, and the whole affair tumbled right down into the river, and went to the deuce. My stars, what a rage I was in! I stood and swore till I hadn't breath left to swear any more."

"And did that help your waggon out of the mess?" asked old False drily.

The man turned round sharply to his questioner, and answered gruffly, "Not exactly, friend, as you seem wisely to have supposed; but, at any rate, it eases a fellow's heart."

"And where have you left your family?" inquired George.

"They're sitting in a tent all together, up yonder by the Yuba," answered the affectionate father, with a laugh. "My son-in-law, another of your wiseacres, who pretend to know everything better than any one else, wouldn't go further till he had some definite object in view—I wonder how long they'll hold out up there—so I started off to look for gold among the hills. Have you got a good place of it?"

"You'd better try," answered old False, shortly.

"But *where*?" asked the stranger.

"Where!—wherever you like," was the answer. "You seem to know everything so well, that it would be a pity to waste one's breath in giving you any advice."

"Go and be hanged," growled Mr. Hoslick, with a malicious look,—and he threw his tools across his shoulder, and walked off away along the bank of the river, without stopping to say good bye.

"That's a nice fellow to be the father of a family," said the old backwoodsman, as Mr. Hoslick disappeared behind a projecting hill. "You've no cause to complain, my lad, of his leaving you to shift for yourself,

when it seems he leaves his own family in much the same way."

"Why is he going all alone into the mountains?" asked George, in some surprise.

"Most likely from envy and distrust," replied False.

"He fancies, most likely, that when he's once arrived among the gold-washers, he's only got to pick up the gold—as many thousands believe; and he's afraid of having to divide what he gets with his son-in-law, or perhaps even with a stranger."

"He's no true American," cried George indignantly.

"Why, you see, my lad," answered his friend, "there are some very savage bad fellows among the many honest good ones in the backwoods—chaps who can't bear a neighbour near them, because his cattle would feed on the same grass as theirs. They're the fellows who grudge their neighbours every bit of bread they put into their mouths; but, Heaven be praised, there are not many of them, and God, in his omniscience, can use them for his purposes."

"I wonder what *that* man can be used for" observed George musingly.

"In one way he's been useful at any rate," replied False, smiling. "If he hadn't refused to help you with his oxen, we two should never have met; and though that may seem to you of little consequence now, you'll perhaps see the advantage of it some day. It all tends to prove what I told you before; namely, that God's ways are wonderful, and that we must not judge by the appearances things present to us, but remember that He sees the end where we only see the beginning."

"But still—my mother and father——"

"You've no cause to lose courage. If, as I still hope

and believe, they have met with no misfortune, we shall yet find them. But now we've talked long enough, and I see your washing's done too, so we'll hang out the clothes to dry, and then go and work a little more in the river, so as not to lose too much precious time."

"And when can we inquire for letters again?"

"The day after to-morrow's Sunday, and then, if I can find my pony, I'll ride over to Yuba city. Will that do for you?"

"Of course it will," answered George. "I'm grateful for all you do for me; though I can't make out the reason why you take so much interest in me."

"Interest!" repeated the old man, with a laugh; "fact is I've got a half-share in you, George; you know we're to divide everything we find,—that's all the interest I can think of just now."

"Upon my word," said George, "our findings don't appear to be worth very much. If we don't improve, we shan't have very much to divide; still, I don't care, we've got enough to pay for our journey, and a little over, for any accident that may happen; and it's something to be able to say that."

The two friends went diligently to work, in a new spot chosen by False. This time the experienced old gold-seeker had determined not to sink a fresh hole, but to try a few abandoned "claims," which had not yet been worked out. A great number of places had been tried by gold-seekers who had soon lost patience, and gone away; many holes had not even been dug fairly down to the rock, and now stood filled with water,—a circumstance which had deterred subsequent adventurers from finishing what had been left undone.

Some of these holes they cleared of water, with much

labour; but when evening came they had not reaped any result from their labours; nevertheless, they began again next morning, though the work was far from agreeable.

One tolerably deep pit, filled almost to the brim with water, they had until now left untouched, till George at last proposed to dig a little canal which would drain off part of the water, and make it an easy matter for them to bale out the rest. Old False had no objection, and by the middle of the day their canal was ready. Directly after dinner they began to bale out the water with the tin pan and a bucket; but as fast as they got rid of the water, a fresh stream came pouring in from a little spring in one side of the hole. This had doubtless been the reason why the people who had dug the hole had abandoned it.

A few panfuls of earth and slime, which they washed out, did not show the slightest trace of gold.

"This looks bad enough," grumbled the old digger. "I guess we might have left the water-hole alone; but as we've gone so far, we'll keep on at it, at any rate, until this evening."

For another hour he continued throwing out the earth, while George kept baling out the water, till at last they came, in one corner, upon the solid rock. Even there the earth contained little or no gold.

To lighten the duty of baling, and at the same time to render the other part of the pit as dry as possible, George took a spade, and dug a hole just beneath where the spring gushed forth, so that the water might collect there, and be afterwards thrown out by pailfuls.

Here he soon struck upon the rock, and threw the earth he had taken from the hole in a corner, to be washed out afterwards.

"Hallo!" exclaimed the old digger, who had been turning over the heap of wet earth with the point of his pickaxe, "here's gold, and a good-sized bit, too." And so saying, he took up a piece about the size of a hazelnut. "Come, we haven't worked for nothing to-day, for that's just as much as we've been able till now to wash out in half a day."

"If *that* were only gold," said George with a laugh, pointing into the hole he had just dug, and in which the water had already collected to the depth of eight or nine inches, "that would be a lump worth talking about."

"Where?" asked his friend, stepping up to him.

"Down there. It quite glitters. But it's nothing but a shining stone."

"Yes, if everything were gold that glitters,"—said the backwoodsman; "but, at any rate, clear it out once more. I can't see it at all."

George did as he was desired, and his old friend stood by, and watched him.

"There it is again," said George, pointing down among the mud.

Without answering a word, False took his pickaxe and carefully probed the hole. Then he thrust his arm into the water, and pulled out a lump of some substance of a dull yellow colour.

"That looks almost like gold," cried George.

"So it does," answered False quietly; "and I'm glad to say that it *is* what it looks like."

"What—is that gold?" cried George, almost alarmed at this stroke of fortune. "Do you mean to say that's *really* gold?"

"Just feel what it weighs," answered his friend gleefully.

And he put the lump into the hand of George, who could scarcely believe in his good luck.

"It's not possible!" he exclaimed.

"Possible!" answered his companion; "why shouldn't it be possible? Everything is possible in the world. But that's always the way. When the people come to California full of plans and hopes, and begin to take to digging, they wouldn't be a bit surprised if they found a lump as big as their heads just under the surface. But when they've been digging away for some time, and learned by experience how seldom anything really worth having turns up, they're tremendously surprised when a piece of luck really falls to their share."

"But such a lump!" exclaimed George, who could not yet believe in his good fortune.

"Why, yes—such a chance don't come often," answered False; "and I myself have been digging about among the hills for above a year without finding anything like it. And you may work a long time before you find a second bit of the same size."

"What may our prize be worth, do you think?" asked George.

"Let me see," said False, weighing the yellow lump in his hand; "it's certainly *four* pounds in weight, if not more; and reckoning the pound at two hundred dollars, it's worth eight hundred among friends. But come, my boy, directly you leave off baling, the water begins to rise again in the hole; and who knows if there isn't more where that lump came from? Not that I expect it, though," he continued, after a pause; "for, oddly enough, it has always been found that where a big bit lay, there was nothing worth having near it. At any rate, though, we'll work the place out, so that we may know what it's

really worth, and have nothing to be sorry for afterwards. At any rate, we shall earn our day's wages."

So they went at it again. The two gold-seekers worked with steady industry, in order to finish washing out the pit that day. But the old man's prophecy proved correct. Beyond the two pieces already mentioned, the pit did not yield enough to pay for the trouble of working.

Next day was Sunday—a day on which, by tacit consent among the gold-seekers, no work was done. It was very rarely that any one disregarded this law, and bade defiance to the general opinion; and those who did so exposed themselves to all sorts of disagreeables.

The old American went off into the forest at daybreak to look for his pony, and succeeded in finding it not far from the camp, breakfasting off the tender grass on the margin of a swamp in company with the erratic Musquito. Half an hour later he was trotting towards the little mining town to fetch letters, or, failing these, to make arrangements for their longer residence in the mines.

CHAPTER XIX.

HOW THE TWO FRIENDS WENT TO SAN FRANCISCO, AND GEORGE STILL SOUGHT FOR HIS PARENTS IN VAIN.

THE quiet day of rest was this time a day of excitement to George, whose mind was tossed by contending emotions. His share of what they had found, up to that date, amounted to above five hundred dollars, a sum far beyond anything he had ever hoped to possess. But when he thought gleefully of this, the remembrance of his poor parents came upon him, and with it the doubt, whether he should ever see them again; and as the possession of wealth would have rejoiced him for their sakes, he now felt doubly grieved that he could not share what fortune had bestowed upon him, with those dear ones.

So the evening came slowly on. His old friend could scarcely be back before night; for the distance there and back was not inconsiderable.

When it at last grew dark, he kindled a brisk fire, and prepared their supper; when, suddenly, Musquito, who found his way back to the tent, pricked up his ears, and uttered a loud eh—haw. Hector also began to bark, and the next moment these demonstrations were answered by the joyful neighing of the approaching pony.

His old friend was coming back at a gallop, and he had *no* sack of provisions at his saddle-bow.

"Are they in San Francisco?" cried George, springing eagerly towards him.

"Can't tell, my lad," answered the old man, laughing at his eagerness, as he dismounted, and turned the pony loose, "but there are letters."

"Letters!—from my parents?" stammered George; and the joyful hope almost took away his breath.

"Well, that I don't know either;" said False, throwing down his saddle and bridle, and feeling in his pockets. "I don't think so, though; for instead of writing, your father would certainly have come himself. But we shall see directly."

"Haven't you opened them yet?" inquired George, in surprise.

"I?" repeated his friend, with a chuckle. "It was more than I durst do. The address is as large as life, to 'George Oakley, Esquire,' and so no one has a right to break the seal but you. Now, stir up the fire, so that we get a good blaze, and then read. I rather wonder myself, from whom the second letter can be."

"Which shall I take first?" cried George, seizing the letters with a trembling hand.

"Fancy that won't matter much—but suppose you begin with this. Who's it from?"

George hastily broke open the missive, and read by the light of the blazing fire:

"MY DEAR MR. OAKLEY,"

and at the end of the letter,—

"From yours sincerely,

"BENJAMIN HALL."

"But I don't know the man at all," was his first comment.

"I know him, though," observed his protector. "He is the man to whom I wrote in your name, and so it's natural enough that he sends his answer to you personally. Read on, you'll find further particulars in the letter;" and George read:

"MY DEAR MR. OAKLEY,

"I have received your favour, but regret that I am unable to furnish the information you require."

"*Unable* to furnish," muttered the old man. But George proceeded hastily:

"In spite of every inquiry, I have not succeeded in obtaining any intelligence respecting your family, and hardly think they have come to San Francisco. If they should come, and should be discovered—which is not always the case here in San Francisco,—I have made arrangements in various quarters for receiving early intelligence of the event, and shall not fail to communicate with you without delay. Your other commissions I have executed——"

"What commissions?" exclaimed George, looking up in wonder from the letter.

"Oh, that relates to my affairs," said his friend; "but as I had written in your name, he answers all in one letter. Go on."

George continued:

"I have executed; and hoping soon to have the pleasure of seeing you in San Francisco,

"I remain, yours very sincerely,

"BENJAMIN HALL."

"So, so," muttered the old hunter; "then, perhaps, I ought to have brought back some provisions after all, and may-be I shall have to ride back all the way to-morrow morning. Let's see, though, what the other letter says. From whom is it?"

George had already broken the seal, and read :

"FROM JAMES LOGGINS."—

"But who is that?"

"Let me see," said the old man, and took the letter. But he had scarcely cast his eyes upon it, before he burst out laughing, and exclaimed. "Don't you see the three crosses? It must be our long friend from the gambling-tent in Sacramento. He said he couldn't write himself, so he has got some friend to do it for him, and scrawled three crosses as a witness to his own signature. So the boy has really kept his word, after all—but what has he got to say? My eyes are too weak to make it out by this firelight. Here, take it, George."

The boy did so, and read :

"MY DEAR GEORGE,

"I'm mortal sorry for having done you such a bad turn—you know when ; but you mustn't be vexed about it any longer, for may-be I can do you a good one that'll set all right again. With regard to your father, I spoke to a man who has seen him here in San Francisco."

"God be praised!—then he's alive!" cried George joyfully, interrupting himself; and the tears filled his eyes so fast that it was some minutes before he could see anything. At length he continued :

"In spite of all my trying—and I've run about till my legs are at least six inches shorter than they used to be,—I couldn't get a sight of him myself. But that he is here, is certain enough, for Bob Kiley knows him well, and has spoken to him. Where he is, though, and how long he'll stay, is more than I can tell you ; but it shan't be for want of trying, if I don't find it out. This San Francisco is such a confounded big place, that it's like looking for a needle in a

bottle of hay to try and find out any person in it among the crooked in-and-out streets and houses. I thought it would be best to tell you at once what I *did* know ; and my opinion is, that you'd better just come here yourself. If you do come, and I hear anything more, I'll leave word for you in the United States Hotel."

"That's prime," cried old False. "Though the boy can't write, he's got his head screwed on the right way. What else does he say?"

"Nothing more, except 'Hoping this will find you well, and that you'll soon come to San Francisco;' and, 'No more at present from your friend, James Loggins.'"

"D'ye see, George," said his old friend, rubbing his hands gleefully, "we shan't have to buy stores after all."

"Are we going to San Francisco?" asked George eagerly.

"Of course we are," was the answer ; "and I'm thinking we'll set out at daybreak to-morrow."

"But what about our tents, and our things?"

"Those we must leave behind us for the present. We can't tell whether we shall want them up here any more or not ; and if we try to sell 'em in a hurry, no one will give us anything worth having for them."

"But some bad fellow will come and steal everything."

"Not much fear of that. No one can tell when we may be back. It's no rare thing here for tents to be left for weeks and weeks, with just a bit of rope across the entrance. Every one will guess that we haven't left any gold behind us, and no one cares to meddle with anything else. We'll take our rifles, blankets, and provisions with us."

"So, we're really off for San Francisco," cried George, who felt as if he could have shouted for joy.

"Yes, my lad, it's the old story. Good luck, like misfortunes, seldom come alone. Yesterday we found the gold, and yesterday your letter arrived at Yuba city: do you see, now, my boy, how wonderfully God can make everything work together for good? If those scoundrels had not attacked us in the wood, and you had not wounded one of them, he wouldn't have had an opportunity of playing you that shabby trick in the tent. If he hadn't cheated you, we should never have stumbled upon that lanky James Loggins, who now thinks it his duty, as a kind of set-off to his former stupidity, to do all he can to help you, and who most likely will have been the means of our finding your parents. Yes, my dear George, if we can only be firmly persuaded that God is full of love and mercy, we shall be able to find our way thankfully and honestly through the world. And now I wish you joy, my boy; for, to-morrow we start for San Francisco."

Their few preparations were quickly made. What few things were indispensably necessary they bound to their saddles, and then started at a good round trot for the distant capital of California.

They reached Sacramento without any adventure; and from this point False determined that they should continue their journey by water, leaving their animals in Sacramento till they came back. There were several people living in the place who made a living by keeping horses and mules in a particular enclosure, and taking care of them till their owners returned, charging a certain weekly sum for their trouble. If our travellers attempted to ride round the whole bay to San Francisco, they would have a very long and tedious journey of it, and lose much valuable time; besides, they would not know what to do

with the pony and Musquito when they got to San Francisco.

Having settled this point, they went on board a steamer which started the same evening; and, after a splendid passage between the oak-clad banks of the Sacramento river, and across the beautiful bay of San Francisco, they found themselves arrived next morning, at daybreak, in the capital of the country.

A number of ships lay at anchor in the bay; some were quite dismantled, and apparently deserted; others with their sails hanging from the yards, as if they had only just arrived, or were preparing for departure. Numberless boats, some careering with full sails before the wind, others propelled by long slender oars or sweeps, were cruising to and fro, and imparted a peculiar look of life to the picture, while the town itself stood prominently forward, against a background of bare mountains.

It was the most wonderful sight one could imagine—the appearance of San Francisco at that time. Here and there a few brick buildings certainly reared their heads among the wooden booths, tents, and sheds, and looked down with a certain pride upon the crowded streets. But they stood like rocks in a perfect sea of pointed tents and wooden gables, over which fluttered the American ensign, and in some instances even Chinese flags. These were the signs of Chinese eating-houses.

“There you see a town,” said the old man, who stood with George on the fore-deck, “which was only laid out by Captain John Voigt in the year 1839, and in 1844 only *had* 200 inhabitants. Now, after a little less than five years, it contains many thousands—*how* many it would be difficult to say,—and in a few years more it will number its inhabitants by hundreds of thousands. The

situation is beautiful. The chain of hills behind it, only a few hundred feet high, is narrow, and the sea breaks immediately beyond; and to the right, past those little white islands in the bay, is the only opening into the Pacific Ocean. The whole immense bay, which stretches away to the left, in an arm only a few miles broad, towards San José, and behind us, towards the mouths of the Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers, is thus sheltered and surrounded by hills and mountains; and everywhere the ships find in the water—which is comparatively calm here—a good refuge against the most violent tempests.

"They're laying out new towns everywhere in the bay; but San Francisco will always be the chief place, as it has the best and most sheltered position. By the way, the real name of the place is not San Francisco; it was the Mexicans who first called it so. The real Californians call the place Yerba Buena, or 'Good Herb,' because of the quantity of peppermint that used to grow there."

"But one doesn't see any trees," said George, "and it's only towards the left that the hills seem at all wooded."

"And even those are only dwarf woods, mostly of the laurel kind," said False. "There's a great want of wood here, certainly; there are good oak-woods over yonder, though, and the valley of the Sacramento contains plenty of trees; and in the Corte Madeira Bay, and in the hills to the right of the strait, there's splendid wood to be had. But we shall land directly; and now, my boy, we are in San Francisco."

The little steamer now went puffing up to a long wooden pier, built out into the bay; and directly George came near enough to recognize faces, he fancied he should find out his father among the crowd. He knew very well

that his father would not expect him to come by the boat; but somehow he felt as if his father ought to know, by instinct, of his approach.

It was in vain. A crowd of people came hurrying up; but they were all strange faces on whom his eyes fell, and they met his inquiring glance with a stare of indifference. He knew none of them, and a heavy sigh burst from his bosom.

"Come, my lad," said his old friend, who seemed to guess what was passing in the boy's mind, "you must not expect to find your father here, unless some mere chance were to lead him this way. But, perhaps our long friend, James Loggins, has left some good news for us in the United States Hotel; so we'll go there first of all, and see about it."

They soon learned which way to go. But to follow the instructions they received was not so easy as they at first thought. While in the mines the weather had been perfectly fine, in San Francisco the rainy season had set in three days before, and particularly on the last two days such streams of water had poured down, that the streets were covered with a coating of wet mud, which was in many places literally knee-deep: at that time the town could not boast of pavements, or even of regular roads. The houses had merely been built in rows in the clayey soil, just as it was; and it can easily be imagined that in wet weather the continual traffic of passengers, horses, and waggons, churned up the ground to such an extent, that it became almost impossible to make way.

The proprietors of a few houses had constructed a peculiar kind of gangway in front of their dwellings, by laying down two beams, parallel with each other, about three feet apart, and filling up the intervening space with

pieces of broken casks. These novel contrivances looked like the ladders by which fowls go to roost; but they answered their purpose to a certain extent. Unfortunately, they were only makeshifts, at the best. They had been introduced before a few houses; but then there were long gaps, where no signs of such a help could be seen; and there was nothing for the unfortunate passers-by but literally to wade through the slush.

The sky had become cloudy again, and the rain fell, not very violently, but in a thick penetrating mist, that threatened to last, and to make the streets still worse than they were; still, our two gold-seekers worked their way on to the United States Hotel, which, fortunately, was not far distant. They inquired in vain for a letter. The barman in the tap had a whole tableful of missives waiting to be called for, but not one of them was addressed to George. The man did not know any one of the name of James Loggins; so now they stood in the great strange city, very much at a loss what to do next.

George's friend very sensibly proposed that instead of carrying their gold about everywhere with them, they should deposit it in one of the banking-houses, of which many had already been established. They would only have to pay a small sum for the security, and would, at any rate, be freed from the chance of having it stolen. This was soon done; and George took the opportunity of inquiring at the bank about his grandfather. But the gentlemen knew nothing about him. They had come quite recently from New York, and had no acquaintance except those with whom they were connected in business: they had no time to look after any one else.

From the bank they went to the police-office, but without success. It had certainly been for some time customary to register the names of new-comers who arrived by ship; but that was only a recent arrangement, and of all who came to California by land no record was kept at all. Nor was there such a name as George Hardy to be found among the list of proprietors of houses in San Francisco.

What was to be done now? To wander about in the city, and make inquiries, was in the first place very uncertain; and then, the state of the weather, and of the streets, made it almost impossible. Nevertheless, they made the endeavour in several directions, greatly deploring that their long friend had not indicated some place where they might at least find him.

At all events, it became necessary to provide themselves with some sort of shelter before night came; for, though it had left off raining, it was not the kind of night in which one could sleep without a tent in the open air.

They did not, of course, like to go into a great hotel, because of the enormous prices charged at those establishments. At last they saw a broad cotton tent, covered with tarpaulin, and under the proprietorship, as a flaring sign stated, of Mr. Patrick O'Flaherty. When, however, they endeavoured to enter this hostelry, they found the occupants so actively engaged in making a tremendous riot, and breaking one another's heads, that they thought it most prudent to retreat.

The next house of the kind they passed belonged to a German, and was in fact nothing more than a great wooden booth, with chairs and a table in the centre, and "bunks," for sleeping, at the sides, like the bed-places

in a ship's cabin. The guests were expected to bring their bedding with them,—for the whole accommodation of that kind supplied in the establishment was comprised in a few pine trunks nailed together. The place was, however, dry ; and, as they had their blankets, and the price asked was moderate, they made up their minds to stay.

Luckily, the German host could speak a little broken English ; and he told his guests that he had come over the mountains only about six weeks before. Of course he knew nothing of John Oakley, but informed them that, in a house he described, at the back of California Street, a little colony of emigrants had taken up their abode. They had arrived a few days before, and perhaps John Oakley might be among them. They had come round the bay with a man who acted as their leader, and intended to settle in San Francisco.

As it was already dark, our two friends could not think of seeking out the place that evening ; so they ate the supper provided for them, which was sufficiently liberal, and well cooked, moreover ; and then wrapped themselves in their blankets, and prepared to pass the night on the hard boards as well as they could.

In the mean time a number of people had assembled in the room. German was principally spoken—a language of which the two friends understood not a word. Six or eight Americans had established themselves here, and were talking with great interest about a band of robbers, whose whereabouts had recently been discovered. They abused the judge at San Francisco desperately, declaring that he was too cowardly, or too weak, or too evil-minded, to protect the honest citizens from the nest of thieves, by taking active measures against them ; and they spoke of

the intention of the citizens shortly to take the affair into their own hands, and to punish the culprits without resorting to law, as a settled affair.

Our two travellers at first listened attentively to this conversation ; but their wanderings through the muddy streets had tired them so thoroughly that their eyes would keep open no longer. They dropped off into a quiet sleep, which lasted till the next morning.

With the daylight they woke refreshed and strengthened ; and directly after breakfast they set out to the place described by the host, in the hope of meeting some of the newly-arrived party. As usual, they were perfectly ready for marching, with rifle on shoulder, and their blankets strapped behind them ; for they did not know whither the next hour might call them away.

Baffled at every point, George was becoming very low-spirited ; and, looking at the thousands of people who went bustling about the busy streets, it seemed to him an impossibility to find his father among the throng—among all of whom he had not yet recognized one familiar face.

At last they came to California Street, and were, at any rate, relieved from the plague of mud, for here the ground became sandy. They also found the house the German had described ; and near it stood one of the peculiarly-shaped heavy waggons used by the Americans for their journeys over the mountains.

“Hallo, George !” suddenly cried a cheery voice ; and when the boy turned, almost startled at the abrupt address, he recognised an old neighbour from Arkansas, who had started with another caravan about a week before the Oakleys left their home.

“Mr. Mullins !” exclaimed George gleefully ; and,

running up to him, seized his hand, and shook it heartily. "Heaven be praised that I've at last met with a friendly face! I almost began to think I was left all alone in the world."

"Why? Haven't you found your father yet?" asked the man, apparently in great wonder.

"My father!" cried George; "is he here?"

"He was yesterday, to my certain knowledge," was the answer;—"but, haven't you been in Sausalita?"

"In Sausalita? I don't even know where the place is."

"Why, on the other side of the bay. I met John Oakley yesterday in the street, and he told me how he had lost you, and had just heard that you were in Sausalita; and he intended to go over by the boat, which has started, or is going to start, from here this morning, to fetch you."

"Good Heaven! then he is gone again!" cried poor George, clasping his hands in despair; "but my mother!—where are my mother and my little sister?"

"Well, now, I'm very sorry; but the fact is, I didn't ask after them. He was in a desperate hurry, and I was busy too; but she's sure to be somewhere here in San Francisco."

"But *where*?"

"Yes, that's a difficult question, certainly. The inn-keepers don't know the names of nine out of ten of their customers; and it would be a dreary long job to go searching through the thousands of little tents inside and outside the town; and it's possible, and even likely enough, that he's taken your mother along with him; for, as things now stand, San Francisco isn't exactly the place to leave a woman by herself in: you've heard

of the band of thieves, I suppose, whom they're after now ? ”

“ Yes ; the people were talking about them where we slept last night—but what am I to do now ? ”

“ Does that old gentleman yonder belong to you ? ”

“ Yes—he's helped me in the kindest way in trying to find my parents : without him I should have been quite lost.”

“ Well, that's very good of him—and, I say, George, if you shouldn't find your old man at once, and happen to be in a fix, just you come to me—you can live with us till we've rummaged out your father somehow or other.”

“ Thank you kindly, friend,” said old False, coming forward to join in the conversation, and offering his hand to George's acquaintance. “ That's a better offer than one can get every day here in California ; but so long as I have anything of my own, the boy must remain with me ; for, you see, we've got used to one another—unless, indeed, George has got tired of my company.”

“ If I had I must be the most ungrateful fellow in the world,” said George with much emotion ; “ but, I thank you for your offer all the same, and shall not forget your kindness. But what's to be done now ? ”

“ That's easily settled,” said the old man. “ We'll go over with the next boat to Sausalita, and if we don't find your parents there, we'll come back here to this very house. If our friend here happens to see your father and mother before we find them, he'll tell them about us, and they'll either wait for us here, or, at any rate, let us hear where we may find them.”

“ That's the best thing,” cried the man ; “ but, then, you've not a moment to lose, for I don't know at what time the steamer starts for Sausalita.”

"And where does it start from?"

"From the long wharf—a good distance from here. With the roads in the state they're in, you've a good half-hour's march before you get there."

"Forward, then!" said the old man; "we'll make haste and get there; and many thanks to you for the best news we've had since we came here."



CHAPTER VII.

THEY WENT TO THE PLACE INDICATED AND VERY CARE OF IT.

THEY WENT TO THE PLACE INDICATED the place indicated in their way all the speed they could make. It was no easy task to get along. For during the past night it had again rained heavily, and the streets were in a worse condition than ever. Nobody in San Francisco seemed to have had any idea that they could ever be in such a bad state. And now, when it was too late, a few attempts were made to place ladders on a better footing, and to establish some means of communication for foot passengers.

In Kearney Street they saw a cart, with a mule harnessed to it, stuck hopelessly fast. The poor beast had sunk in the mud so far above the saddle-girths; its nose had also become immersed in the black, pulpy mass, and it was suffocated before anything effectual could be done for its rescue.

In the middle of the town it was almost impossible to make way; and they had to keep to the streets near the waterside, where the state of affairs did not seem quite so hopeless.

On the sandy margin of the bay they would have got on faster, if another and a far stranger obstacle had not impeded their progress. Whole shiploads of goods were lying here, exposed to wind and weather, sun and rain, and nobody took the trouble to clear them away. Bar-

rels of biscuit, mouldy and burst open; crates of crockery-ware and china, tea-chests, coffee-bags, iron bars,—in fact, every component of an assorted cargo, lay heaped in a long line by the waterside, till it formed a complete dam towards the bay.

The owners of these goods had probably had no place to store them in, and had been unwilling, or unable, to pay the exorbitant prices asked for warehouse-room. They had also perhaps trusted to the continuance of fine dry weather; but now, surprised by the rainy season, the goods were being hopelessly ruined, and men marched over them and through them with the utmost indifference. The crates of china had been trodden to pieces, the tea-chests crushed, and a perfect path led through the midst of once valuable cargoes which were now scarcely worth removing.

George was particularly struck as he walked along by the immense number of shirts and stockings which lay about in all directions abandoned and ownerless.

Many ships had brought over cotton stockings and shirts, as especially useful commodities, and had so overstocked the market that they were often given away for nominal prices. The dealers sold them merely to clear out the stock, and make room for more valuable goods. Labour was at such a premium, moreover, that half a dollar was charged for washing a single shirt, whereas they could be procured new for exactly the same price—namely, six dollars the dozen: so the people got into the habit of throwing their soiled linen into the street, and buying new.

George had not much time to spend in such contemplations; for as they approached the “long wharf,” they heard the bell for the steam-boats ringing, and saw fro

a distance a great many people standing together on the quay. They had to hurry on as fast as ever they could, to avoid being too late for the boat.

Once on the planks of the wharf that projected far out into the bay, they could get forward more rapidly. George was rather surprised to overhear the observation, "There go a couple more," from two or three people, as they passed. Engrossed, however, by the thought of rejoining his father, he paid no further attention to the circumstance; and they were soon on the plank leading from the wharf to the boat moored alongside. Two respectably-dressed men, apparently merchants, were just in advance of them, and were about to embark, when two others, who seemed placed as sentries, stopped them, and one of them said civilly,—

"Very sorry, gentlemen, but there's no room for you here; you don't belong to the company."

"Can't *we* go?" asked George in some alarm.

"Yes, yes, of course; you've got your rifles, and belong to us," was the singular reply. "But look sharp, you were very nearly being too late."

The shrill little bell began sounding again, and our two friends had but just time to leap on board before the steamer was pushed off from the wharf with long poles, and they went puffing away with the ebb-tide at a good rate down the bay.

"Now, my lads, be smart," cried a thickset, stout-looking man with a large beard, and with a long rifle in his hand, who began moving busily to and fro along the deck; "you all know your posts, I hope, so that there's no confusion when we arrive?"

"All right, Bentley," replied a fat little man, so

covered with pistols and daggers, in addition to the huge double-barrelled gun he carried, that he looked more like a robber-captain than a peaceful citizen of the United States; "I'm only afraid we may come too late."

"I've looked out for that, old man," answered the first man, with a laugh. "To make things sure, I sent a boat over at daybreak, and another an hour afterwards; and they're both lying at anchor at a place I've decided on. If a boat had left the island, they'd have given us the signal by firing a cannon, and then have given chase. But no shot has been fired this morning; so, everything's gone right so far."

"My stars!" said old False in a low voice to George, "wherever have we got to now? The whole boat is crowded with armed men, and yet not one of them is in uniform."

"Hallo! whom have we here?" suddenly exclaimed the man with the great beard, standing still in wonder in front of George; "do *you* belong to the Vigilance Committee, my lad? My word, but you've begun early. Have you left school yet?"

George coloured up to the eyes at this strange address, and answered,—

"I wanted to go to Sausalita."

"To Sausalita? Whew!" cried the man with the beard. "And so you got on board *this* boat?"

"I think, sir," said False, stepping forward, "we've both of us got on to a wrong boat, by mistake; or do you stop at Sausalita?"

"That's not bad!" shouted the bearded man. "Now we've got passengers for Sausalita on board! Didn't any one ask you for your certificates of membership?"

"No; most likely that was forgotten in the hurry of starting," replied the old man. "We came at the last moment, just as the boat was pushing off. Perhaps you'll be good enough to tell us where this steamer, with all its armed crew, is going."

"Well, friend," answered Mr. Bentley, who seemed to be the leader of the others, "there's no need to make a secret of that any longer. I certainly can't put you ashore at Sausalita; for the fact is, we've turned out to look after a band of rascals, who, according to certain information we've received, are now lurking in that island yonder, Los Angelos. But at any rate, you've got your rifles and knives with you. I suppose that's why they let you come on board; and I think you can't employ your time better, now you *are* here, than in lending us a hand; for, after all, it's your interest as much as ours that the rascally crew should be hunted out. And we've had to take the job in hand ourselves; for the authorities either can't help us, or won't."

"That's all very fair and honourable," said old False, "and I should very much like to make one; the only thing is, that we're in a tarnal hurry to get to Sausalita, to find out this boy's parents, who are lost. Through the merest accident in the world we missed the boat this morning."

"Sorry for it; but that was not our fault," answered the men quietly. "We don't want to force any one to join us; and as, after all, your being on board here is owing to the carelessness of our inspector, you may, if you like, stay quietly here while we go ashore. When we've done what we've got to do, you can go back with us to San Francisco; and that's all I can do for you."

"Hallo!" cried old False, "don't mistake me. I

didn't mean it that way. If we have to lose our time, we may just as well lend a hand in whatever's going on as stand with our arms dangling. I fancy that's your idea, too, George, eh ? ”

“ Certainly,” answered George ; “ but, my father.”

“ Listen to me, my lad,” the leader struck in again ; “ if you're in such a mighty hurry to get to Sausalita, you may find a chance of going there sooner than you expect. I shouldn't be at all surprised if a boat comes to join us from there as soon as we're once fairly started, and you could easily go back in that. Of course it wouldn't go off till we've finished our job.”

“ Then I'll help, with all my heart,” cried George gaily.

“ That's a brave lad. Here, Mr. Smith, you'll have the kindness to find a station for these new recruits. We shall need a little additional strength in the centre of the line, for the island is broad. Is that dog yours ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ A good hunter ? ”

“ Capital.”

“ So much the better. Who knows if we shan't have some work for him ; and good dogs are not to be got in San Francisco.”

So saying, he turned away to see after things in another part of the steamer.

“ We've done a clever thing, now, George,” said old False, with a laugh, as the leader moved away. “ I might have had the sense to ask where the boat was going. Well, who knows whether it may not turn out for the best ? We've been so mercifully protected hitherto, that we may hope the Guiding Hand will lead us to the end.

Besides, it will be interesting to you, George ; and you will get to see a bit of Californian life."

" But my parents," said George.

" It can't be helped," was the unanswerable reply. " We're here, and must get out the best way we can, that's all. At any rate, the business won't last long. And if your father don't find you at Sausalita, he'll most likely go back to San Francisco. If we'd thought the matter properly over, we should, perhaps, have done better to stay where we were. But everything came so quickly, that there was no time to think. I'm curious, by the way, to see how this job will end."

" Is that Los Angeles ? " asked George, as the steamer approached an island of tolerable size, partly covered with forest ; not, however, making directly for it, but leaving it a little to the left, and steering a course as if intending to proceed along the upper bay towards Sacramento.

" That's the place," was the answer. " It seems to me our steersman is keeping away from it on purpose, so that the gentlemen there mayn't be warned too soon. Perhaps, too, he wants to give the rocks a wide berth."

The strong little steamer now puffed round the long point of Los Angeles. But scarcely had it got this promontory fairly in the rear, when it changed its course altogether, and instead of proceeding up the Carquines Bay, ran along parallel with the coast of Los Angeles.

On the left paddle-box stood a man who now acted as pilot, and gave orders to the man at the helm. He was evidently well acquainted with the shore. At the other end of the island the water was deep enough to allow of the steamer's coming close in shore.

George now noticed that while he had been gazing at

the land, a boat with a crew of armed men had left the steamer, and rowed towards a little creek. There lay two little craft, easily discernible from the deck : one broad, like a boat, the other long and narrow, like a canoe. The boat's crew seemed to have been sent to take possession of these.

Hardly had the boat touched the shore before all the crew jumped out in great haste ; and the people on the steamer, who had already received their instructions, divided themselves into three bodies. Our two friends were stationed among the central party ; and it soon became manifest that the island was to be completely searched through.

The order was passed to shoot every one without mercy who should refuse to stand and answer them. As soon as a man fled, or offered to make resistance, his life was forfeited ; but those who submitted quietly were to be treated with every kindness, only they were to be detained till further orders.

The steamer had, meanwhile, disembarked its armed freight, with the exception of a few men who had been previously told off to remain on board. These pulled in the tow-ropes as the others cast them loose, and steaming from the anchorage, began cruising slowly round the island. The weather was exceedingly favourable to their enterprise, for the sky was overcast and the air warm and sultry ; yet there was not a breath of wind to enable a boat, put out from the island, to make sail, and thus escape them.

At the same time they saw how a boat, that had been lying at anchor in the roadstead, weighed, and came rowing towards the land. The body who formed the right wing waited for this boat, which quickly disembarked a

portion of its crew, and then returned to take up its former station. Its office was to watch the narrow strait separating the island from the nearest part of the mainland.

Our two friends had already marched away with the central body and left wing, who had to make a longer circuit before they could take up their stations.

At first they kept pretty close together, as the island was still narrow; but as the land became broader they were obliged to spread more. Still there were so many of them, that they had no need to march more than thirty yards apart; nor was the wood thick enough to prevent them from seeing everything at so short a distance.

The line advanced very slowly, in order not to pass by anything remarkable without noticing it; yet, although they examined everything most carefully, they could not discover anything that looked in the least suspicious; and soon they had traversed more than half of the island without disturbing anything but a herd of half-wild cattle, whom they would have allowed to pass through their ranks without let or hindrance. But the creatures had become frightened at the sight of so many men, and kept running on before them. Now and then a couple of old bulls would stand still, pawing the earth, putting down their heads, and looking more than half-inclined to make an attack; but seeing foes everywhere, they remained undecided upon what point to fall. At last, probably at the margin of their usual pasture-ground, the oldest of the herd, a strong bull, with a black-and-white hide, made a stand just in front of old False, and stood digging his short thick horns into the earth, and roaring with rage. The men

ending



The attack of the Wild Cattle.

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were now on an open meadow, where not even a tree offered them a shelter; and an attack from such an assailant would, therefore, have been dangerous enough. Old False was not the man to be easily daunted. He stood quietly still, slowly lifted his rifle, took aim, and just as the bull paused again, some ten paces from him, and lowered his head before making a rush, he fired, and the great beast fell to the ground as if struck by lightning. The old hunter had lodged his bullet just between the bull's shoulders, breaking the spine.

"Bravo, stranger!" cried the man who marched to the old American's right (for George was posted at his left hand); that's not the first time you've shot with a rifle."

"Guess it's not," was False's laconic answer; and he stopped and loaded again. The others, meanwhile, continued to advance slowly, while the cattle, frightened by the shot, flourished their tails and fled on before them.

George stopped, to wait till his friend had loaded and was ready to come on. Hector employed the interval to run aside towards the left, where the thicket began again; and here he began snuffing round a clump of laurel-bushes, and scratching up the earth with his paws.

George went up to him; but as he could see nothing particular, and his old friend had finished loading, he called the dog off again, and marched forward with the rest.

Suddenly they saw before them a couple of little huts, of deal planks, roughly nailed together: these had already been occupied by a body of their own men, sent out for that purpose.

One of these buildings was quite empty, and seemed

to have been used as a storehouse at some earlier period ; in the other they found three men, who had nothing suspicious about them, and seemed infinitely astonished at the unexpected visit. They were detained, however ; and when the main body came up, the leader had them brought out in front of the hut, and instituted a short examination ; which was useless, for they would not confess anything.

According to their tale, they were taking care of the cattle that ran wild about the island, to prevent the crews of boats belonging to passing ships from landing and hunting the beasts—a thing that had happened once or twice ; beyond this, they employed themselves in fishing, and sent the fish they caught to San Francisco.

"How many of you are on the island ?" asked one of the people, who had stepped out of the boat when the steamer approached the island.

"How many! three," was the answer ; "we are all here."

"Then, who was the fourth man, whom I saw in the boat in which you tried to get over to the coast yonder ?"

"The fourth," repeated the man, slightly changing colour ; "he went in the canoe, fishing."

"Indeed! No canoe or boat has put off from the island, though," said the stranger ; "and why did you put about when you saw that the armed boat had cut off your retreat ?"

"That's easily told," answered the man, who was evidently prepared for this question : "because there are plenty of bad fellows knocking about in the bay, and we didn't want to have anything to say to them. If we'd known that there were honest men in the boat, we should have gone quietly on."

"Oh, I see," said the questioner; "then you're not afraid of *honest* men. Well, that's lucky for you. But we should like to have a word with the fourth man. He must have some plaguy strong reason for keeping his face out of the light."

"I'll tell you what, men," struck in the leader of the party. "Don't make your case worse through denying what you know to be true. You've been betrayed. We know you've got a store of stolen goods here on the island; so you'd best confess at once where it is, and it will lessen your punishment. But if you persist in denying it——"

"Go and hang yourself," interrupted one of the accused, with a savage look; "what's the good of talking such nonsense as that? D'ye see any signs here of a *store*, as you call it? You'd better go and look for yourselves. These two huts are the only ones on the island, and I don't suppose you'd find much hanging on the trees. As for us, we're free citizens of the United States, and don't intend to stand ill-usage from anybody,"

"Don't get angry, friend," replied Bentley, in a cool tone; "for you won't get out of this through blustering, I can tell you. All of us here, or nearly all, are citizens of the Union too, and have not only taken upon ourselves the responsibility of what we're doing, but what's more, we've resolved not to leave it half done. So you won't confess anything?"

"I've told you once, you may go and be hanged," growled the man. "You may do what you like, for anything I care, but don't bother me. There's the island,—best search it through; and if you find any goods stored up in it, you're cleverer than we've been, that's all. And

now I'm not going to answer any more of your questions."

"Very good," replied the leader quietly. "Smith, you'll be so good as to stay here with six men; let these people go back into their house, and shoot down any of them without mercy who tries to get out, or shows any signs of resistance."

"You've no right to keep us here," cried the islander, in an insolent tone.

"I know that, my man," answered the leader, as quietly as ever; "but you see we've got the *power*; and if you're a wise man, you'll just submit. I can tell you, though, for your comfort, that a Vigilance Committee has been formed—that is, an association of men who are determined to put down robbery and theft here in California, without troubling the constables to interfere. *Honest* men have nothing at all to fear from us; on the contrary, we afford them every protection we can give. So, if you're honest men, you'll only have to make up your minds to remain under suspicion for an hour or two—a misfortune that has happened to better men than yourselves. But there's been enough said; and if you don't want to be bound, and treated as thieves and robbers, I advise you to go quietly into that house, and wait to see what happens next."

"You 'll have to answer for this," growled the man. But Bentley paid no further attention to him. He only beckoned Smith to carry out his orders; and did not give the word for the line to advance until the three fellows were safely ensconced in the house, with sentinels with loaded rifles at the door.

They had traversed the broadest part of the island, and now advanced in a closer line; but nothing at all

suspicious could they discover. If a band of thieves had really lurked there, it was not at all unlikely that they had kept spies in San Francisco, and had quitted their retreat the day before. For the present, the three prisoners in the hut seemed the only occupants of the island.

As they drew closer together the cattle they had driven before them also became crowded on one spot. Unable to continue their flight, on account of the steepness of the ground near the coast, the beasts at last turned upon their pursuers. As there were trees here, the men had only to spring behind the nearest trunks, and let the frightened animals rush past them towards their usual pasturing-place.

At this moment a single shot was fired out in the bay.

The left wing had meantime marched round the point, and was seen advancing to meet the rest. Here and there separate groups were formed ; the line, which here became unnecessary, was broken ; and while some spoke of searching the whole island through once more, others considered it unnecessary, and were for returning home.

"I expected it from the first," said Mr. Smith, the little fat man with the armoury of daggers and pistols. "I expected from the beginning that the whole thing would end in smoke. Our thieves are much too cunning to build their nest under our very noses, so near San Francisco. Depend upon it they've their hiding-place somewhere among the mountains on the coast, where it's no use trying to find them."

"The man from whom I had the intelligence," retorted the leader, "is a perfectly trustworthy fellow ; and I'm quite sure he would not have spoken if he'd not been quite certain about it."

"Then why didn't he come with us himself?"

"Because he's been very ill indeed for the last day or two. Besides, he didn't pretend to point out the exact spot, but only said he knew that goods had been landed here, and that suspicious characters were lurking about. The very reason for fitting out the expedition was to get certain intelligence; and it will never do to give it up because we didn't find out the nest at the very first search. If the goods are really here on the island—and I don't in the least doubt their being here,—we may be sure they've been well hidden. Besides, that fellow was quite taken aback when I asked him about the fourth man. If he's not been captured by the steamer, or by our boat, he must be hidden somewhere in the island; and where *he* is, there's sure to be something more. Their turning about in their boat is suspicious too."

"That's all very fine," said another; "but it don't give us the shadow of a right to keep the fellows we have caught in custody. I'm ready to lend a hand in anything there is to be done towards putting down the thieving here; but we must have some grounds for proceeding against the people. It won't do to hang a man on bare suspicion."

CHAPTER XXI.

HOW HECTOR HELPED THEM IN THEIR SEARCH ; AND HOW GEORGE
FOUND AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE ON THE ISLAND.

WHILE the men were thus talking over their plans, apparently undecided as to what course they should adopt, George had separated himself from the rest, and stepped out on a little promontory, beneath which the rocky coast-wall, overhung by thick bushes, receded abruptly, leaving the view free across the bay to the east, where the mainland lay, and also towards the point where they had approached the island. A boat, which came rowing towards them, arrested his attention ; it came in the direction from Sausalita ; and perhaps, if the plan of searching the island through again were given up, he might hope to be taken in that boat to Sausalita.

Hector, who had been standing beside him for a time, closely examining the ground, suddenly became restless, and growled as if angry about something. At first George paid no attention to him, for his head was filled with other thoughts ; but the dog pressed closer and closer to him, till at last he quite pushed him towards the descent ; and finally George was obliged to step hastily back, or he would have slipped on the loose stones, and perhaps injured himself severely.

"For shame, Hector," he cried. "Silence, sir. Did you never see a boat before, or hear the splash of oars, you foolish fellow?"

Hector growled again, but in a quiet, careful way, as when, in hunting, he wished to announce that a deer was not far off. His peculiar growl made George more attentive to his motions; and, on turning round, he saw the dog, close to the steep descent, looking intently down, with all the hair bristling up along his back.

"What's the matter with your dog?" asked his old friend, who happened to come up at the moment. "I've never seen him go on that way. Does he do so often?"

"No," answered George in a low voice; "but perhaps one of the little prairie wolves has hidden itself about here. He can't bear them; and they always make his hair bristle up just in that way."

"Nonsense! There are no prairie wolves on this island. He don't do so with other wild animals?"

"Yes, sometimes when a panther comes, and when he sees Indians or negroes."

"I thought as much," whispered the old man. "Quiet, good dog—quiet, good Hector. Keep where you are a minute, George, and take your gun from your shoulder. Keep a sharp look out for anything that stirs down below. I shall be back directly."

George looked after him in wonder, as he strode away towards the nearest group of armed men, to whom he spoke a few words; whereupon they all turned quickly towards the spot where George was standing with the dog; and the leader immediately sent patrols of ten men to the edge of the steep rocky bank, down which they scrambled as best they could.

"Hallo, my little man," cried Bentley, coming up to George, "what's the matter with your dog? He scents something—eh?"

"Yes, sir, he does, certainly," replied the boy. "There must be something down there that appears suspicious to him, for his hair doesn't bristle up like that for every trifle. My idea is that there's a prairie wolf somewhere."

"Not much chance of finding any of those here, my little hero," said the man, with a good-humoured smile; "but I shouldn't be surprised if your dog were in the right, after all; for, as I see now, the bushes that overhang the bank just here haven't been planted so thickly by Nature alone; for dry thorns and brambles have been piled upon it, and my only wonder is that we did not observe it before."


"There are tracks down this way," said George's old companion, who now came up, and began examining the ground attentively; "I can make them out famously here in the soft earth. But just here nobody can get down to the coast without running a good chance of breaking his neck."

"Can't you find any *return traces*?"

"I can't distinguish any."

"That's first-rate—for then we've caught the gentlemen we came to look after. They can't get away any longer, for the whole place is surrounded, and I think we shall manage to conjure them up. Keep silence for a minute or two, and I'll open a parley with the good folks."

All were silent immediately, and even Hector left off growling; but he would not give up his position at the edge of the descent.



"Hallo, down there!" the captain called into the thicket.

There was no reply, and nothing stirred; they could plainly distinguish the splashing of the little waves in the bay below.

"Hallo, down there!" repeated the captain, after a short pause. "Do you intend to answer us, or shall we have to come down and fetch you?"

All was still silent.

"You may scream till you're hoarse," said little fat Smith; "and whom d'ye expect to find hanging on by the brambles?—there's nothing but a bank of gravel."

"The tracks are all in one direction," repeated old False. "Who knows if there isn't one of the many *caves* down below, that one finds so many of on the seashore?"

"I'll soon find that out!" cried George. "Just hold my rifle for a minute or two."

"What are you going to do?" asked his companion.

"To climb on to that tree that overhangs the cliff," replied George, who was divesting himself of his blanket and hunting-frock, that he might be as light as possible. "One would be sure to get a much better view of the cliff from there than from here."

"Take care, boy—take care what you're about," exclaimed old False anxiously; "if a branch breaks you may break your arms and legs, or even your neck."

"No fear of that," said George, with a laugh; "I'm a light weight, and can climb like a cat."

"That's famous, my little man," said the leader, approvingly. "You've got your wits about you, and your heart in the right place. Smith, you might take example by that youngster!"

"Oh, indeed!" whined the fat man. "Fine thing

that, for me to clamber out there. I should draw the tree right out of the ground, root and all, and be flung to the bottom like a flour-sack."

The others burst into a laugh, and George ran out on the overhanging stem of a kind of oak, that hung over the abyss, shooting out from among a network of under-wood; he got out as far as he possibly could, while his friends from the shore watched the effect of his manœuvres with anxious hearts; but though he had climbed out further than was at all prudent, he found that the underwood prevented him from getting a fair view of the cliff, beyond whose margin he had now advanced. With quick decision he drew his hunting-knife from his girdle, and began to hack away the branches that obstructed his sight.

"Boy, boy—mind what you're about!" shouted his old friend, in a tone of alarm; "you're venturing out too far, and you'll be tumbling down next."

"Let him alone!" cried the leader of the expedition. "He's a capital chap, and worth any ten men. He'll take care of himself, never fear."

"Hallo!" shouted George—"a cave goes into the cliff!"

"Hurrah!—didn't I say so!" shouted the captain joyfully. "Do you see any one inside?"

"No—the bushes are in my way."

"Take care!" exclaimed old False suddenly. "The root's dragging out. Come in, boy—come in!"

"Come in—quick!" shouted twenty voices together; and George, alarmed by the sudden cry, tried to obey the command as quickly as he could; but it was already too late. The earth, softened by the late heavy rains, had given way, and while part of the roots of the decayed old

tree broke off, the rest loosened its hold, and the stem began to sink slowly downwards; and before George could climb up far enough to regain the top of the cliff, it suddenly overbalanced, and disappeared.

"Gracious Heaven! he is lost!" screamed the old hunter, running in the greatest alarm to the edge of the cliff. For a moment the rest of the party stood in mute dismay at the sudden mishap that had happened to the brave youngster,—and they expected nothing less than to hear the dull sound of his fall on the rough stones of the beach, eighty feet below. The tree had certainly not been completely torn out, but still hung to the cliff by a fragment of the root; but it had been drawn downwards so suddenly that it seemed but too likely the boy had been shaken off.

"All right!" his cheery voice was suddenly heard shouting; and as he clambered up from amid a chaos of branches and twining plants, a thundering "Hurrah!" from the delighted spectators sounded across the bay. Twenty hands were stretched out to seize him; and a few seconds afterwards George stood safe and sound on the firm ground.

While his friend good-humouredly scolded him for his foolhardiness, and admonished him to be more careful of his life and limbs, the men had, for their part, not remained idle. With their hunting-knives and axes they loosened the remaining fragments of roots by which the tree clung to the earth, and sent it crashing over the cliff.

What they purposed was completely effected. The tree, in its fall, tore along with it all that had been entangled with its stem or roots, and left a great gap, free from bushes or underwood through which

they could perfectly overlook a part of the rocky wall beneath them.

A few of the people had already been despatched to the hut, to bring spades, and a number of axes which had been noticed there; and they now came back with these implements; and while some laid aside their rifles, and cleared all the wood out of the way, so as to have a clear course, others set about shovelling away the earth, so as to make something like a path down to the entrance of the cave.

Before half an hour had gone by, the practical Americans had produced a kind of staircase; and as the underwood had all been cut away, they felled a young pine tree, and fastened it with a rope at the outer side, so as to form a kind of protecting rail. Another rope was also let down, to make all secure; and a few minutes afterwards the path was ready for use.

"Now, my lads!" cried the leader, bending down towards the mouth of the cave; "we've made it as easy for ye as we can; so come up, without any more words." No answer. All as silent as the grave.

"Bad luck to it!" grumbled one of the party; "I reckon we've just been losing our time here, like so many fools, and the birds have flown half an hour ago."

"We shall see that presently," said the leader. "Is there any one here who wishes particularly to go down?"

There was a silence among the people for a few seconds; and then George, who was young and hot-headed, started forward, and was about to volunteer, when False caught him by the arm, and drew him back very unceremoniously, while a queer humorous smile played about his mouth.

"Just you keep back, Johnny Newcome," he grumbled. "There's no need for you to thrust your nose into everything. This is not child's play; and I've a fancy for giving you up to your father without any of your bones broken."

Suddenly a young Hercules of a fellow, of about twenty-one, stepped forward, and said, with rather an embarrassed smile, but with a look of courage and resolution in his eye, too,—

"Well, I can't say I *particularly* want to climb down there, and I know many things that I'd rather do. But, as I guess one of us will have to go, it may as well be me as any one else. So I'll go."

"Do you know what you've got to do there, my lad?"

"Beckon I do. If there's any one down there I'll find him out, and he shall come up with me,—or else I shall stay below!" and with this very practical observation, he looked to the lock of his rifle, saw that his knife was loose in the sheath, and began descending the steep path. As soon as he had got to the entrance of the cave, holding fast by the rope, he called out,—

"Plenty of tracks leading in and none out. If the chaps haven't some other way out, they're in here, safe enough;"—and then, thrusting his head in at the entrance with an utter contempt of his own danger, he shouted, at the top of his voice,—

"Hallo!—you in there! There's somebody coming to see you. Nobody at home?"

"If you advance another step," cried a threatening voice from the inside, "I'll send a bullet through your head!"

"Shoot and' be hanged!" retorted the undaunted backwoodsman; "for hanged you'll be, on the very next

tree, if you raise a finger against me. Hallo! in there;—how many are there of you?"

There was no answer. But though he stepped boldly into the cave, no shot was fired at him.

"Now, I'll tell you what it is, you chaps," said the young man, addressing the caged robbers, who had concealed themselves in what they considered an impregnable hiding-place, "I can't get you out all alone; but if you're so bent on staying where you are, we shan't interfere with your wishes."

He had seen, at a rapid glance, all that he wanted to see of the entrance of the cave; and taking his rifle in his left hand, he deliberately climbed up again to rejoin the others.

"Well, James, how is it?" asked half a dozen in a breath. "Won't they come out?"

"No," answered the envoy; "they're bent on staying down there, and it's my idea that we'd best let them have their way. Now, bring your spades this way. In an hour we can block up the whole entrance. A couple of poles, well rammed in, will keep the whole tight and secure; and then the fellows may winter there like so many bears."

"Hurrah!—that's a famous plan," shouted several, who, perhaps, did not quite relish the idea of having to attack the desperate crew in their dark retreat; and a number of hands were speedily at work to cut off the retreat of the imprisoned robbers. Unfortunately for them, there was a kind of ledge immediately in front of their retreat, on which the earth lodged; and though a portion rolled off again, quite enough remained, from the zealously-wielded shovels, to make a goodly heap of sand, gravel, and stones in front of the thieves' den.

"Surely," observed George to his friend, in some alarm, "they don't intend to bury those unfortunate wretches alive?"

"No fear of that," laughed False; "they won't let it come to that. When once they see that matters are growing serious, they'll turn out nimbly enough; besides, it don't make much difference, for they're almost certain to be hanged."

The heap of earth increased every moment—the lower half of the entrance was already blocked up, and still the caged robbers persevered in their obstinate silence. A score of sturdy young fellows now began to drag forward huge stones, which they rolled down the incline in such a way that they went tumbling in at the entrance of the cave. Some few were seized by the men within, and hurled out again; but this only proved to the attacking party that the prisoners were aware of the danger in which they stood, and faster and faster the stones and earth rattled downwards. The heap of earth had now risen far beyond the lower half of the entrance, and all were at work with undiminished vigour, to increase it still further, and entirely to close up the hole. Then a voice from within suddenly cried "Stop!"

"D'ye mean to come up?" asked Bentley, looking down.

"Yes," was at last answered, in a hesitating tone; "give us down a spade, to clear away the earth."

"Not such fools!" cried the leader. "Clear it away with your paws, and *into* the cave; for the first man I catch throwing any out shall be shot dead."

There was no answer, and for a little while all was quiet; the prisoners were evidently holding a council among themselves. At last they heard the men raking

among the earth, and in about ten minutes a shaggy head was thrust forth.

The man, a savage-looking, ragged fellow, forced his way with evident difficulty through the narrow opening, cast a look of impotent malice at his enemies, and then climbed to the top of the cliff by the help of the rope. He was immediately taken into custody, and his hands were securely fastened behind his back.

A second followed, and then a third, and a fourth, and still more, until seven men, with two negroes among them, had scrambled out of the narrow hole, and been secured and bound.

"Mark my words, lads," said the leader, "we shall find the storehouse of stolen goods somewhere near here. Are you all out, or is any one left?"

"I should fancy you'd got enough of us," growled the man who had come out first. "If you don't believe me, you'd better look yourself."

"Yes, my lad, that I shall do; but we shall want a light for that."

"When I went for the shovels," said a young fellow, "I'd a notion we might have a place of this kind to look through, so I brought these two candles with me out of the hut."

"That's a clever fellow!" cried Bentley; "now we shall manage famously. Now, James, should you like to clamber down again?"

"Seems to me I'm to be used as a pointer-dog to-day," said the young man, laughing; "but I don't mind. Had I better take my rifle?"

"Here—take my revolver," said another; "it's lighter to carry."

"That's true; and now I'll see what there is to be

seen." So saying, he swung himself down, and in another minute had disappeared in the cave. He did not remain there long, for ten minutes afterwards he came clambering back, and reported that there was nothing to be seen in the cave but the bare walls. The cave had evidently, he said, been made by men, to serve as a hiding-place, and but for the dog they would scarcely have found it out.

The prisoners, who looked particularly surly and dogged, were led away to the huts, and on their arrival were exhorted to confess where they had hidden their plunder. They obstinately refused to make any statement, denied ever having stolen a dollar's worth of anything, and declared themselves to be runaway sailors, who had hidden there for fear of being caught and sent back to their ships. Nothing more could be extracted from them.

"Lads," said the leader, at last, "I reckon you all know that these fellows are telling lies; still, one can't well expect them to confess what would most likely hang every one of them. There's a way I know of getting it out of them, if it should become necessary; but before we try that, we'll look for ourselves if we can't find out the place. My notion is, that the goods are hidden in just such a cave as that from which we have unearthed these gentlemen—perhaps quite close; and as we are here, we may as well take the trouble to look as leave it alone."

George had listened attentively to this speech, and it now occurred to him again that Hector had snuffed and scratched most suspiciously about a certain spot when they first landed on the island; so he stepped up to Mr. Bentley, and said,—

"Would you be kind enough to send two of the people with me? My dog Hector would persist in scratching up the earth in one part of the island as we came along; perhaps, after all, it may be possible that——"

"Certainly, my boy, certainly," was the leader's ready answer. "Your dog has behaved so well to-day, that we've every reason to trust him. I'll go with you myself;—and, Cook and Hopkins do you come, too, and bring the two spades. Is it far from here?"

"Just where Mr. False shot the bull."

"False! Is your friend's name False?"

"Yes."

"Hum—queer name that! But come, we mustn't waste time. And you, Smith, give the signal for the steamer to lay to; there's no need of its cruising about any more—the boat may come ashore too. I noticed a little while ago that it's towing a kind of canoe; so, most likely they've made prisoners there too. Before we assemble the whole company together, we'll just see if we can't get more out of them than these gentlemen choose to tell us."

So saying, he strode rapidly up the little acclivity which led to the place, where they found the bull still lying in his blood. Old False accompanied them.

Hector jumped gleefully round and round them, and seemed to be quite unconscious of the prominent part he was playing in the business of the day. But when George led him to the well-remembered spot, he became attentive, and began to run to and fro with his nose to the ground.

Though the leader of the expedition wore good broad-cloth, he was an old hunter from the United States, and had passed many a month among the rocky mountains

His quick eye at once noticed a circumstance that had escaped George's observation; namely, that a quantity of the leaves on the ground had not been blown, but *carried* together, and strewed upon the earth; for there were to be found among the mass many leaves of trees that did not grow about there at all.

Hector had soon found the exact spot where he had before been scratching, and now began smelling at it again. He did not stop there long, however, but went strolling along, looking for something on the ground, as if he thought there was some game to be found in the neighbourhood.

The men, once helped into the right track, needed his services no longer. The more they examined the place, the more convinced they became that things were not here in their natural state. It became abundantly evident that the earth had been disturbed there a short time before; and, after a few trials with the two spades, they suddenly struck upon something hard, just under the bush where Hector had first begun scratching.

The earth was soon removed; and in a minute or two they discovered beneath it a kind of door, which led into a cellar dug in the ground, and had itself been ingeniously concealed by the earth and leaves piled upon it.

Here they found everything that they had hitherto sought in vain: the secret magazine of the robbers was discovered, and their guilt proved in the most convincing manner.

They were stopped in their rejoicing by the arrival of the boat's crew, who came hurrying up with two prisoners, whom they had captured, to learn the result of their comrades' operations upon the island.

George had not paid particular attention to the

appearance of the new-comers, anticipating nothing but strange faces among them. But suddenly he sprang forward with a joyful shout, and ran up to one of them, crying,—

“Jim Loggins—Jim Loggins!”

“George, my boy! by all that’s wonderful—how did you get here? Have you found your father?” cried the individual addressed, seizing the youngster’s hand, and shaking it heartily.

“No,” replied George, hastily; “I was just on my way to Sausalita in search of him.”

“Sausalita! What in the world d’ye want to do in Sausalita? He isn’t up there. But we’ll talk of that afterwards. I’ve found a bird to-day, my lad; and I’m mortal glad that I’ve happened just to meet you. D’ye know *that* fellow?” And so saying he stepped back, and unceremoniously pushed forward one of the prisoners, who scowled upon him with a look of deadly hatred.

“It’s the man from the gambling-house!” cried George, considerably startled. “Where did you catch him?”

“Where? why, in a canoe,” answered long Jim Loggins, laughing. “It’s my belief that the island got too hot for his constitution; so these two gentlemen trusted to their little cockleshell of a canoe, and wanted to get out of our way. They’d nearly done it, too; for we couldn’t follow them fast enough with our heavy boat, till I had the luck to shoot the oar clean out of the other scamp’s hand. Before they could get it again, we’d got well within range, and they had to give in. But now I’ve caught the rascal, we’ll just see if your purse isn’t to be got again; for I’m much mistaken if he hasn’t it about him still.”

With a few words, interlarded with some very strong expressions, the long man told his comrades and the leader of the expedition, who had by this time joined them, the story of the adventure in the gambling-house at Sacramento, and how the prisoner had cheated and slandered the poor boy. Old False also came up, and corroborated the account, adding the story of the attempt at robbery and murder in the wood, when George had saved his life, and probably shot the robber in the arm.

Though he at first made some resistance, the man's arm was stripped, and really displayed the scar of a newly-healed wound. On searching him they also found the bag of gold, and three others—all tolerably heavy—which the man wore in his girdle, and which Jim Loggins held up with a shout of delight.

"That's the bag," exclaimed old False, "as sure as I'm alive. I know it as if I'd only parted from it yesterday. It's grown rather dirty since I saw it last; but it's heavier too. Who knows whom the rascally thief may have been plundering now? I don't think we shall easily find that out; and it seems to me, George, you've the best right to the bag, just as it is. Has any one anything to say against it?"

"No, certainly not," said the leader of the enterprise; "we've got to thank the little man and his dog for the whole success of our search, and he certainly deserves to have his property given up to him without delay. If there are a few ounces more than he lost, so much the better. But now, my lads, be smart, and let's get the prisoners on board; and Mr. Smith shall remain by them with a guard. The rest must help to carry the property here down to the coast, and to put it into boats to be taken on board. We must have it all shipped before night."

George at first objected to take the gold ; for the bag was at least three times as heavy as it had been when it was stolen from him. But Jim Loggins would not give in ; and as he now began to talk about George's father, the boy soon forgot his resistance in the more absorbing topic.

His father, it appeared, had not gone to Sausalita, though he had started that very morning with the intention of proceeding thither by the first boat. Jim Loggins had met him on the wharf, and given him every information he could desire, and advised him to write at once to the address in the mines which he had received from George himself.

George's father, however, had not the patience to entrust to a letter what he could do in person. He had found out one of his neighbours from Missouri, in San Francisco, with whom he could leave his wife and child, and therefore determined to proceed at once to Sacramento, and thence into the mountains to fetch his boy ; and all that Jim now knew was, that he would most likely start by the next boat.

George eagerly asked the name of the man from Missouri, at whose house he could find his mother. But it appeared that Jim had never thought of making the inquiry, in the hurry of embarkation that morning ; and the only thing to be done was to wait for the first boat that started for Sacramento, and meet his father, if he should really embark.

When did the next boat start ? Jim Loggins did not know. Some of the people, however, declared that one had gone off at daybreak that morning. By this one, therefore, his father could not have gone ; and there would not be another till the following evening, at about

six. If, therefore, George went on board early enough, he could stop his father before he left San Francisco.

Here, at last, was something like a secure hope of seeing his parents again, after their long parting; and George felt as if he could have cried aloud for joy. His father was, then, really at that moment in San Francisco; and if they got back speedily, he might meet him that very evening. Unfortunately, however, his patience was doomed to a heavy trial; for the shipping of the goods took much more time than had at first been anticipated. The gang must have carried on their nefarious trade for many months, to amass such a store as they had collected; all kinds of bales and chests, often with very valuable contents, were found in the dark, well-chosen hiding-place. At another time, George would have been highly interested in the unloading of this wonderful storehouse; but now every moment of delay seemed to him an age.

At last the leader, who had been employed till then among his followers, came forward, and said good-humouredly,—

“Look you, my lad, I’m sorry I can’t send you over to Sausalita. But you see how much we have to do here, and how impossible it is to spare anybody. If you like, though, you can go over to San Francisco with me; and from there you’ll be sure to find a boat going this evening.”

“Are you really going to San Francisco?” exclaimed George, in high glee.

“Yes, in the boat. I *must* go, to give in a report of the successful issue of our enterprise.”

“And will you take me with you?”

“Willingly; and your brave dog, Hector, as well.”

"But there's my old friend yonder," observed George hesitatingly; "I shouldn't like to go without him."

"Oh, your Mr. False," said Bentley. "Well, we shall have to sit rather close, but we'll make it do, at a pinch; and if it's doing you a favour, I don't care. But now let's be off, for the wind has freshened a little, and is in our favour. We must take advantage of it, to get across as fast as we can."

CHAPTER XXII.

THE GREAT COMBAT BETWEEN THE GRIZZLY BEAR, THE TWO BULLS,
AND THE SEVEN WOLVES.

THE passage to San Francisco was a rapid one. The wind blew pretty fresh, and was in their favour; and in less than an hour they ran alongside the long wharf. But it was in vain they sought out the neighbour from Missouri. John Oakley had not shown himself there again. The next morning they again wandered uselessly through the dirty streets of the town. At last there was nothing left for them to do but to wait for the departure of the Sacramento steamer, which was really announced for the next evening at six o'clock. Then they might hope at length to meet with the long-lost ones.

In the city, the capture of the robbers of Los Angeles, and the discovery of their hidden store of goods, was the one topic of conversation, and the next day but one was fixed for the trial of the prisoners. That some of them would be hanged appeared certain; for lawlessness and theft had so alarmingly increased of late, and so many murders had been committed, that a warning example appeared perfectly necessary.

While the people of San Francisco were thus pronouncing judgment for life or death over their fellow-citizens, the busy bustling life of the city continued to run its daily round; and where so much money was earned and continually changed hands, it was natural

that the people should wish for an opportunity of spending a little on pleasure.

Besides the gambling-houses—fit schools for every kind of ~~iniquity~~ theatres had already been

Entered at Stationer's Hall.

Comparative absence of female
of amusement did not please
of pleasure-seekers wished for
thus a speculative genius had
bull-fights at the Dolores
Francisco, with remarkable
ed even of these at last, for,
as always the same thing over
was quite a shout of rejoicing
hen it was announced by a
great combat between a full-
ertain wild bulls would take
day at the Dolores Mission.
o see this new sight; and the
llars was readily paid for ad-

capture the strangest reports
ancisco, certainly did not belie
s an immense specimen of his
"which had been selected to
rably unable to stand against
ould hardly be called a combat;
bear's immense paw was enough
first bull; and the second and third,
as they were successively let into the arena, were dis-
posed of in an equally summary manner. Thus it hap-
pened each time that the audience departed very ill
satisfied with the entertainment provided in return for

the high entrance-money they had paid; but on this day something peculiarly exciting had been promised.

Great placards, staring at the passers-by in every street, announced the fact that, on this afternoon, at two o'clock, in a secure and spacious arena, built especially for the purpose at the Dolores Mission, two bulls of unusual size and vast strength, from the rancho, or farm, of Don Sanchez, would *together* undertake the combat against the yet unconquered grizzly bear; while, in order to increase the interest of the spectacle, a number of prairie wolves, caught especially for the purpose, would take part in the fight. The entrance fee was three dollars for the first circle, and two dollars for the rest of the house.

"I say, George," observed old Mr. False, as the two friends stood looking at one of these placards, "isn't it just possible that the bear's an old acquaintance of ours? There's no guessing at what he's like from the portrait they've given here; but if the Yankee got him alive to San Francisco, it's more than likely he may have hit upon this plan to make out his expenses."

"I've thought the same thing once or twice," said George, laughing. "I wish we could get a sight of him. I'm sure I should know him again directly; for we two were a little too near each other for me to forget him in a hurry."

"Well—there'd be time for us to go out and see, after all," observed the old hunter, after a little consideration. "The boat doesn't start till six o'clock, and the whole affair there will be over before four. Besides," he added, with a smile, "you're a man of property now, and can afford three dollars entrance-fee for once in a way."

"But suppose it isn't our bear?" said George.

"Well, we shan't fret much if it's not; but look over

yonder, George ; that fellow in the long-tail coat, and with the tall hat on his head. I'm certain we've seen that queer figure somewhere before."

"Why, that's the Yankee, from the mines!" exclaimed George, after a hasty glance at the approaching stranger.

"The man who bought the bear of us?"

"The very same,—and who took him away afterwards."

"Then we shall soon learn the rights of the matter," said False; and he at once began striding through the mud, to the opposite side of the street.

"Hallo, sir!" he abruptly cried out to the astonished Yankee; "don't you remember us two?"

"You? Well, I can't say I've the pleasure," was the somewhat discouraging reply.

"Well," continued False, "you ought to remember that little chap, though. Have you forgotten how he drove the bear into the pit for you?"

"Ah, of course I do!" cried the man,—and he held out his hand to George; "mortal glad to meet you here again. Well, I 'spect you'll go out to the Mission, to have a look at your bear?"

"So it is our bear?"

"Undoubtedly; and a fine piece of work I had of it, to get him down here alive,—and a frightful expense too. You may take my word for it, I haven't made a cent by him; in fact, I'm a couple of hundred dollars out of pocket. Well," he added, "at any rate you must come to-day, and get two or three friends to come with you. You never saw such a sight in your life: two cruel great bulls, and seven wolves. I'm afraid they'll make an end of my poor old Grizzly, and cut him

up so that I shan't even be able to sell his skin. Well, well; we've all got to work hard, to knock out a living. —It begins at two o'clock precisely, I should tell ye, and if you want a good place, you'll have to be there at least an hour before; for the people are like mad about seeing the fight to-day. I've just got two or three things to settle here in town, and then I'm going out myself; so, good morning t'ye. Don't forget, it's two o'clock to the minute."

So saying, he turned away, and went with hurried and yet cautious tread, to avoid staining himself too much with the mud, down the street, leaving our two friends to their own reflections.

"Well, the least he could have done would have been to offer us a couple of free tickets," observed old False; "at least he might have given *you* one."

"Then he'd be no true Yankee," answered George, laughing; "they're as tough as raw hide. They used to call upon us in Arkansas sometimes, selling watches and tinned ware; and wherever a dollar was to be got, they were certain to carry it off."

"Well, shall we go?"

"If we don't miss any chance of finding father, by being out of the way."

"We've as much chance there as here. It's just as likely that he's gone out there, as that we shall meet him anywhere here in the town."

"I'm very much afraid," said George, "that unless father has been gold-washing, and has had good luck, like us, he'd hardly have two dollars left, to spend on such a sight. But I should like to go too. The time would go horribly slow in San Francisco, and the evening will be here all the sooner. But, wouldn't it be best

to leave our rifles in the town? They'll only be in our way out there."

"I don't know about that," replied old False; "I don't care about putting my rifle in any place that I don't quite know. If any greenhorn goes meddling with it, and manages to put anything out of order, it's not easy to have it repaired in such a place as this. After all, we're used to the weight; and as for our blankets, they'll do to sit down upon; for I reckon they won't have any cushioned seats."

"Then, suppose we start at once. It can't be far short of twelve o'clock, and we shall be able to get something to eat out there; don't you think so?"

The old man nodded acquiescence, and the two went briskly off towards the bay, in the direction of the Mission, which was not far distant—but the way was a difficult one.

Before they were fairly out of San Francisco the sandy soil began, in which they soon found themselves sinking ankle-deep. A few months later, by the way, not only that road, but the whole city, was properly planked, which gave the streets quite an aristocratic appearance, and established the freedom of communication. But at that time the road still led *up* one little sandhill, and *down* another, and among dwarf oaks and laurels; till, at last, after an hour's sharp marching, they saw the pleasant Dolores Mission, with its great square mission building and little low Spanish houses, before them.

There was abundant evidence of something unusual being in progress; for the travellers were overtaken every moment by Americans and Californians, who, in defiance of the deep sand, went trotting gaily past on their tough little horses. They also found foot-passengers

in plenty, of whom not a few, exhausted by the fatigues of the road, had already halted in the shade of bushes and trees, and stood with streaming foreheads, taking breath.

They also overtook two little troops of Mexican gold-washers, with a couple of mules, and half a dozen crowbars and iron bowls, who were going up by land to the mines, making the long circuit all round the bay.

Once at the Mission, the promised spectacle completely engrossed their attention. First, they hastened to provide themselves with tickets, and then went into a very inferior kind of eating-house, not far off, to get some kind of dinner. They would have liked to leave their rifles here; but such a crowd of people kept moving in and out, and pushing to and fro, that the proprietor, while giving them a ready permission to put away their guns in any corner they liked, especially declared that he could not be responsible for the safety of any property on such a busy day. Rather than expose themselves to the chance of losing their weapons altogether, they therefore determined to take them to the exhibition. They were, however, compelled to leave the dog behind; for, in the crowd of spectators it would be impossible to keep him near them. Hector, however, was more easily provided for, and could take care of himself. George tied him up in a kind of outhouse, threw down his own blanket before him, and felt pretty certain that the good dog would be found at his post if his master should remain away half a day. Still it would have been too great a risk to leave their rifles under the guardianship even of faithful Hector. They shouldered their guns, therefore, and set out for the large round wooden arena, in which the combat was to begin in the course of half an hour.

The barrier consisted of a strong palisade, about fourteen feet high, so constructed that the bear, who is clumsy at climbing, could not get to the top. The ground had been dug out two or three feet deep, so that the back-seats for the spectators had not to be so much raised. Of course there were no numbered seats; that would have taken up too much space. Whoever could crowd into the seats, crowded in; and, in spite of their tickets of admission, our two friends had the greatest difficulty in establishing themselves on the second seat from the front. There were only four tiers of seats in all; and behind the fourth a very strong and well-built platform gave accommodation to those who had only paid for standing room. The place held many more than a thousand spectators; and as it became densely crowded within half an hour after the opening of the doors, the Yankee had evidently not made a bad thing of his bear fight. Even if the bear should be killed, the skin and flesh would bring the speculator almost as much as he had paid up in the mines; and this was already the third representation which poor Grizzly had been obliged, very much against his will, to give.

Close to the entrance, in a large strong cage, one side of which had been pushed forward into a line with the palisades, lay the bear; and a sliding door had been contrived, by which he was to be let into the arena. The two bulls were outside, in a kind of enclosure called a corral; and the public, growing impatient, began to scream and shout, in anything but dulcet tones, for the combatants.

It was certainly considerably past two o'clock when the proprietor appeared above the entrance, where an enclosed space had been left free for him; and, taking off

his hat to the assemblage with a deep bow, he delivered himself as follows, in a loud but rather nasal tone :—

“ Gentlemen!—I’m particularly glad to see you here to-day in such gratifying numbers; and I calculate you’ll soon find that you haven’t paid away your money for nothing. I’ve something to offer you that’s never been seen before;—positively, I’m quite curious myself to see how it’ll turn out. The representation’s just a-going to begin!”

He bowed again, and waved his hat, and a dozen jovial voices sang out, “ Hurrah for the Yankee!” but they were put down by a general cry for silence; for, at the same instant a sliding panel, to which no one had paid particular attention, was raised, and all waited in breathless expectation of something remarkable that was to issue forth. But nothing came: the space disclosed by the removal of the sliding door remained dark and empty.

For a couple of minutes the breathless silence of expectation continued; but when nothing at all appeared, two or three people began to laugh; and as if that had broken the spell, a hundred voices joined in at once, whistling, hissing, and laughing.

The Yankee himself had leant forward in anxious expectation, whereupon the spectators began to call out,—

“ Hallo, Yankee! is that all of your grizzly bear?—Out with him!—turn out the grizzly!”

“ Gentlemen!” screamed the long Yankee, raising himself to his full height;—but a perfect storm of shrieks and yells drowned every syllable he attempted to utter; and suddenly he disappeared, as if the earth had swallowed him up.

He seemed to have made some effort below the stage, though; for suddenly a little pointed grey head peeped out from the opening.

"Hurrah! Here he comes!" shouted the assembly; but in another moment he had vanished again.

A new tumult of laughter and hissing hereupon arose, which partially subsided on the Yankee suddenly popping up again like a "Jack-in-the-box." With his sharp face crimson from passion, and holding his hat in one hand and his red silk-handkerchief waving in the other, he sprang upon a bench; and as the people saw that he was about to say something, and were, moreover, impatient for an explanation, silence was soon completely restored.

"Gentlemen!" squeaked the long showman, "what I've got to say is, that if you persist in making such a jolly row, I shan't get any of the wolves to turn out, I'm precious certain of that!"

This oration produced mingled cries of "Hurrah for the Yankee!" and "Silence—hold your noise, out there!" till at last the more peaceably-disposed among the audience gained the day by making more noise than the others.

In the mean time, the men appointed to that duty had been endeavouring to drive the prairie wolves out of their retreat into the open space. As the spectators now remained tolerably quiet, though a few riotous spirits still sought to keep up a disturbance, one of the wolves was soon seen emerging from his den. He looked cautiously out, and seemed inclined to draw back again when he saw such an assembly waiting to welcome him; but his companions would not allow that. A torch had been lighted and thrust into their den, and they

scampered away from the flame in alarm, and came crowding out in a body. As soon as they had been fairly hunted out, the door was closed behind them, and their retreat cut off. As the necessity for silence was thus removed, the noisy spirits gave full vent to their riotous disposition.

There were seven of the little prairie wolves; and very uncomfortable they looked, in their novel position. They began running rapidly to and fro in the arena, passing close against the palisades; and when some of the spectators who were nearest poked at them with sticks, or kicked against the palisades, they stopped for a moment, to show their white teeth in an angry snarl, and then continued their restless career round the arena, seeking for an outlet, to escape from the unenviable notoriety of which they found themselves the objects—but everywhere they found themselves baffled by the high enclosure.

Suddenly a wide door was flung open—the cayotas scampered away in dismay, as a great black bull came bounding into the arena, with his head raised proudly, his tail erect, and his eyes glaring. Excited by the loud shout of applause that greeted him, he paused in the midst of his career, began pawing the ground, till the sand flew about in showers, and uttered a short angry roar. The first enemies he encountered were the little prairie wolves, who suddenly stood still, astonished at the unexpected apparition. The bull did not leave them much time for consideration: lowering his head, he ran furiously at them, and the cowardly crew fled on all sides, with their tails between their legs.

The gate was at once closed behind him, and the crowd shouted lustily in approval.

Of course the heavy bull could not overtake his nimble

little foes, who slipped away from between his very hoofs when he came near them. The chase continued thus for about ten minutes, and at last the bull stopped, out of breath, and glared furiously at his antagonists, when suddenly a second door was opened, and another bull, even larger than the first, spotted black and grey, leaped into the circle, and the door was at once securely closed behind him.

The two formidable beasts no sooner caught sight of each other, than they began to plough up the sandy ground with their horns, and after circling round the arena two or three times, rushed at each other with a tremendous crash. The space was too narrow to allow of their taking a long run; and as they were almost equal in strength, the victory remained for some time undecided.

A fight between the two bulls, in which one or both might be seriously injured, was not in the plan of the day's entertainment; the Yankee therefore took advantage of the time while the two mighty brutes were striving for the mastery, to cause the door of the bear's den to be quickly raised.

Quite close to this opening the little wolves had crowded together, looking on in some bewilderment at the fight between the two bulls. One of them suddenly caught sight of the open door of the den, and little suspecting what kind of inmate dwelt there, rushed in, followed by his six companions. But soon the poor frightened wolf came running out again much faster than he went in, with all the rest after him. Right across the open space they rushed, scampering in their terror almost under the hoofs of the bulls; and behind them, with his ears laid back, and his jaws open, came the angry bear.

The door thundered to behind him, and a hurricane of applause rewarded the Yankee for having successfully brought the combatants together.

Though Grizzly had come out of his lair with a run, he stopped short at sight of the two bulls, who were pressing their broad foreheads together; and he even looked behind him once or twice, as if he meditated "going home;" but he soon saw that his retreat in that direction was cut off; whereupon he squatted down on the sand, looking defiantly round, and waiting to see what would be done next. This was his third appearance on the field, which he had quitted as conqueror on both the previous occasions, and he did not seem to have much fear for the result.

The bulls, who were standing sideways towards him, no sooner caught sight of the common enemy than they stopped in their combat, and turned towards the bear, while the startled wolves ran about in dismay, not knowing whither to flee for succour.

"That's our bear, sure enough," cried George eagerly, when Bruin stood fairly exposed to view; "just as he looked when he came rushing out after the prairie wolves he glared at me that day when Musquito carried me nearly into his jaws."

"Yes, you might both of you have done something cleverer than you did, that day," answered old False with a chuckle; "and still the bear was, after all, the occasion of your becoming acquainted with Jim Loggins; and it was through him we heard news of your father; for you bought the leather bag with the share you got of his price; and so we ought to be grateful to the old greycoat, and wish him well out of his scrape. Knives and scissors! what great claws the fellow's got, and

how quietly he keeps looking at the two bulls: somehow I feel quite curious to see who'll begin first."

He was really a tremendous bear. His head was almost as broad as those of the bulls themselves, and his gigantic paws were armed with formidable claws. The grizzly bear is moreover celebrated for his strength, and those who have seen him say that he can carry off a horse easily, and break the thickest ox-bone with a single bite. Trusting to his strength, the bear, in this case, remained perfectly quiet, and seemed waiting to see what his antagonists would do. If they attacked him, he was perfectly able to defend himself.

The two bulls seemed quite aware of this fact, and had suspended their private quarrel, in presence of the common enemy. They lifted their broad muzzles, scenting the presence of the grizzly with evident dread, and began restlessly pawing the ground. Like the bear, they treated the prairie wolves with the most supreme contempt.

Bruin looked on quietly enough for a time: then, as if he wanted to become better acquainted with the locality in which he found himself, he rose slowly from the ground, and went snuffling round by the barriers. The prairie wolves scampered away before him; but the bulls stood their ground, bending their horns down cautiously as he approached. He, on his part, however, seemed quite regardless of their presence, until he had come within ten steps of them; and quietly continued his shuffling march, until he had travelled quite round the circle.

The spectators were tolerably silent; for all knew that the combat, brought on by some accident, might begin at any moment; and all were anxious to see who would be the first aggressor.

When poor Grizzly got back to his house door, of which, unfortunately, he had not the key, he sat down as before, but now turned his back contemptuously upon the two bulls, and began grubbing up the sand with one paw, as if to prepare a bed for himself. The occasion, however, appeared unpropitious; for he soon left off, looked at the bulls over his shoulder, got up, and began walking deliberately towards the one nearest him. He evidently intended no harm; for once he stopped on the way, to scratch his side with his left fore paw, and then quietly walked on again.

The spotted bull, towards whom his march was directed, retreated a step or two, with lowered horns, but then stood still and waited for his enemy. The bear, scarcely seeming to notice the threatening attitude of the bull, marched gravely up to him, and thrust out his nose to sniff at him, till it nearly touched the bull. Scarcely did the latter feel the bear's hot breath, before he made a side-thrust at him, and gave Bruin's shoulder a severe dig with his right horn. This roused the bear's ire; and in an instant he gave the bull such a blow in the face with his paw, that a whole strip of skin hung down; and then, as if he considered the matter satisfactorily settled, he turned round, to go back to his former station.

The bull roared aloud with pain and rage; and, perhaps gaining fresh courage from the fact that the bear turned his back upon him, and to a certain extent seemed to be running away, he struck the ground with his horn, and then ran roaring after his enemy.

If he thought, however, that the bear was running away through any fear of him, he was vastly mistaken; for no sooner did Bruin hear the tramp of his adversary at his heels, than he turned round with a swift-

ness that one would hardly have thought possible in a beast of his clumsy build. Before the bull could touch him with his horns, he gave him such a tremendous blow on the side of the head, that he flew sideways against the palisades, from whence he rebounded, and fell on his knees, half-stunned by the shock.

The bear now seemed inclined to rush upon his foe; and if he had carried his intention into effect, the bull's fate would have been quickly decided. Old Grizzly actually raised himself up on his hind legs, and turned towards his adversary, whom the blow had, for the time, quite disabled; but the other bull, foreseeing, perhaps, that if he did not come to his comrade's assistance, he would have to wage war *alone* against their tremendous adversary, and perhaps feeling his pride hurt at the thought of yielding up the victory to such a clumsy-looking fellow, gave a short roar, put down his head, and ran at the bear with a start of about fifteen paces, with such force that he threw him fairly off his balance, and pitched him completely on to the horns of the other bull.

The stunned creature had so far recovered as to be able to feel the weight thus cast upon him, and staggered to his feet, angrily shaking his powerful head.

Old Grizzly, who came of a race never much renowned for patience and long-suffering, fairly lost his temper at this outrage. He threw himself up on his hind legs in a twinkling, and met the attack of the second bull with an exertion of the same tremendous force which had proved so baleful to the first. Nimble avoiding the blow—for he had learned to appreciate the bovine strength with which he had to deal, he rushed sideways at the bull, who roared aloud with pain and anger, as the bear buried his paws in

his neck, and seized him at the same time with his formidable fangs. By this time the first bull had recovered himself; and though the blood was streaming down his face, he buried both his horns in the bear's side, and tossed him completely over his comrade's back, so that the bear rolled over and over in the dust.

Bruin scrambled up again directly; but seemed so stunned and astonished at his sudden fall, and at the loud shouts of applause which burst forth on all sides of the arena, that he refrained from renewing the combat. The victorious bull ran round the arena with head and tail erect, roaring in triumph and defiance.

The prairie wolves had till now remained huddled together in a heap, passive spectators of the fight. But now, when the roaring bull leaped into the midst of them, they fled on all sides in dismay; and one of them, turning his head in his flight, ran unawares towards the grizzly bear. It was an unfortunate chance for him; for Bruin was not in the humour to let him pass unnoticed. Before the wolf, who discovered his error too late, could start back, he received a blow from the bear's paw, which literally cut him in two. At the same moment, the triumphant bull caught another of the little wolves on his horns, and tossed him into the air as if he had been a feather; and the enthusiasm of the rude spectators became boundless.

They screamed, yelled, and waved their hats, and the Yankee danced about on one leg, more frantic than all the others. He seemed to think that the fight would now be considered as finished, and that his valuable prize would be spared for a fourth representation.

This was, however, not by any means a settled point. The angry bear had tasted blood, and been greatly

offended by the checks he had received ; while the two bulls, on the other hand, had learned that their adversary was not entirely invincible.

For a short time—as long, at least, as the demonstration of the spectators lasted, Bruin seemed inclined to stand only on the defensive, though he now and then cast a malicious glance at the poor little prairie wolves, as though he thought it had all been their fault.

The poor little brutes were in a lamentable position. By nature far from quarrelsome—at least, where they had to cope with an adversary of superior strength, here they had a hard task of it; to keep out of the way of the three furious combatants. It was natural enough that they should quarrel among themselves, and each show the other his teeth when they came into collision, as they did every minute ; but peace was always restored the instant the bulls approached them ; then they would scutter away all together, looking in vain for a place where they might take refuge from this very unsatisfactory state of things.

The bull who had been first attacked had by this time fully recovered himself from the bear's rough embrace ; and, roused to anger by the check he had experienced, and by the smart of his wounds, he showed himself the most turbulent of the two. He churned up the dust till it flew about in clouds, snorted, and roared, and shook his broad head, to get rid of the blood that blinded him.

The black bull had grown somewhat shy ; for he could not forget how easily the bear had got the better of him. The quietness of his enemy, however, and the aggressive attitude taken by his fellow-combatant, seemed to inspire him with fresh courage.

Suddenly the bear rose, and took a few steps towards his cage, in front of which the wolves were huddled together. While the little creatures scampered hurriedly away, the Yankee gave his men the order to open the door, thinking this a favourable moment for putting an end to the show. He had kept his engagement with the public, and thought himself no longer their debtor. But if he imagined the audience would let him carry out his manœuvre, he was grievously mistaken.

A perfect whirlwind of execration broke loose against him as soon as the door began to rise.

"Down—down—throw the Yankee in himself, if he tries to cheat us!" was roared on all sides by the enraged spectators.

They would not hear of any compromise. The fight had scarcely begun, they thought, and now they were to have nothing more for their three dollars than the pleasure of having seen the bear scratch the two bulls, and kill a wolf.

Savage, untamed men, when once their thirst for blood has been aroused, are worse than wild animals. They are not content with tasting, but would fain empty the disgusting goblet to the dregs.

The Yankee, on the other hand, who had his own profit in view, exerted himself in vain to make the rioters listen to some kind of explanation. He sprang on the bench, waved his hat, and shouted out some words which no one heard or cared to hear. They wanted to see the fight continued; and, in the state of raging excitement in which they all were, the man knew very well that his life would have been in danger if he had tried to enforce his will by violence. He therefore angrily gave the required signal, and the half-open door closed again, amid a

tempest of applause from the spectators; while the Yankee himself sank moodily back upon his seat, with his hat pressed over his brow.

Nobody had a thought to waste upon him; for the spotted bull, made more savage than ever by the tumult around him, suddenly stamped on the ground, and renewed the scarcely interrupted combat.

Before the bear could turn round to face him, he had rushed upon him, and thrown him down, falling upon him as the heavy bear tumbled. This was unlucky for him; for, before he could regain his feet, the bear had seized him, and was digging his cruel claws into his enemy's neck. He could not manage to hold on; for the bull shook him off by the mere weight of his body; but the torn skin hung down in strips from his neck, and he roared aloud with pain and rage.

Before the bear could completely recover himself, the black bull came rushing upon him, and caught him full on the shoulder. The bear's huge paw struck him in return upon the mouth, tearing away the lower jaw; but in his rage the mutilated creature did not seem to feel this terrific wound; with a second blow he thrust one of his sharp horns completely into the bear's body, so that the blood gushed forth in a thick stream.

The bear was mortally wounded, and probably felt it. The spectators, excited by the horrid fight, shrieked and yelled out their applause; and Grizzly, suddenly raising himself on his hind legs, glared wildly round at the heaving crowd.

The spotted bull could hardly stand on his feet; but he still collected all his remaining strength for a last attack. His black comrade, too, rendered almost mad by the pain of his wounds, once more began pawing the

blood-stained ground, and then rushed on with his head lowered.

This was too much for the poor bear. He had received such tremendous knocks that he could endure no more ; and thus, with the lifeblood welling from his wound, he made a dash at the palisades, collected his last strength, and flung himself upward against the high and steep barrier, just in front of the spot where George and his old friend were sitting.

There was a loud shout of alarm from all whose places were near the point of attack ; and careless, against whom they ran, the foremost ranks rushed back upon those behind them. The latter likewise pressed back, or were thrust back ; and as the rail gave way, which surrounded the arena, hundreds of men went rolling down, at the risk of breaking their limbs, into the sand, which was, luckily, soft and yielding.

Nor was their flight without reason ; for Grizzly had actually seized the upper edge of the palisades with his tremendous claws, and was struggling, with his hind feet thrust into the wood-work, to draw up his huge body. In a few moments he would infallibly have succeeded in his endeavour ; and woe be to him who should then come in his way.

"Shoot him !—for Heaven's sake, shoot him !" shouted the spectators on the opposite side, who were certainly safe for the moment, but could not tell whither the poor hunted beast might run in his desperation. Most of the spectators had loaded pistols, for few people went abroad unarmed in those days ; but the danger came so suddenly upon them, that they never thought of using them. They had all seen with what terrible effect the bear could use his claws, and naturally felt no desire to come in contact with him.

The only two spectators who, armed with rifles, stood their ground during the headlong flight of the rest were our two friends, George and False. George, it must be confessed, had thought of flight, when he first saw the bear's claws scratching and tearing at the palisades; but old False's hand was on his shoulder, and the old hunter cried,—

"Now, George, it is our turn! Aim at his eye, my lad, the moment he raises his head." Then the old hunting spirit awoke in the boy's breast. In an instant he had cocked his rifle; and as the old man sprang aside on the benches so suddenly vacated, so as to fire at the bear from the other side, as soon as he raised himself sufficiently, the two stood with their rifles presented, boldly bidding defiance to the danger.

The black bull, meanwhile, had made another rush, with all his force, at the bear; but as Bruin scrambled up out of his way, he struck with such force against the palisades, that he broke both his horns, and fell down stunned and lifeless. The next moment Grizzly raised his head; his right paw was stretched out, and seized one of the benches; and now he brought the hind paw forward after it—a second more, and he *must* gain the top.

As he had not kept his head still for one moment, the two hunters had not been able to take aim at him. Now, as he brought his hind paw forward, he paused for a moment. It was perhaps only a single instant; but it was enough for the purpose; for the two friends discharged their rifles so nearly together that the reports sounded almost like one; and the two bullets, fired at scarcely two paces' distance, pierced through the bear's eye to his brain.

Even when the two deadly shots had struck him, he

still convulsively clung to the palisades; but then his paws lost their hold on the planks to which he had hung, his sinews became relaxed, and, amid a shout of joy and triumph from the whole assemblage, he fell heavily back into the arena—dead.

CHAPTER XXIII.

CONCLUSION.

A SCENE of indescribable confusion ensued. Some of the spectators, who had heard the reports of the two rifles, but did not know if the bear had been disabled, continued their flight in all directions, spreading terror and dismay through the whole settlement.

Women and children were seen flying distractedly towards the sheltering houses; horsemen went galloping along with loosened rein, and the terrified cry, "The bear! the bear!" rang from end to end of the Mission.

On the scene of combat, on the contrary, there was loud rejoicing; for, all who had not been able to run off fast enough, and had perforce witnessed the two lucky shots, broke out into thundering acclamations, this time in honour of the two marksmen. Even the Yankee was glad to see the affair settled in this way; for if the bear had broken loose, he knew well enough it would have been lost to him. As it was, he could not certainly institute a fourth representation; but he could sell the hide and flesh, which would be well paid for; and so he could very well be satisfied.

Every one now hastened towards the two hunters, who had stood quietly reloading their rifles; and all were especially eager to shake hands with the boy who had shown such cool courage. The people scarcely looked

at the scene of the late combat, which certainly presented a sufficiently ghastly appearance.

The spotted bull lay, completely covered with blood, in the centre of the arena, quite dead, and the black one was so fearfully mutilated that he had to be despatched at once. No one paid any attention to the wolves. No sooner, however, was the door of the circle opened, than they made a simultaneous rush between the legs of the startled men, and running out into the open plain, ran for their lives.

No one dreamed of stopping them, or cared about their flight, except the Yankee, who began abusing his assistants for their carelessness in letting the creatures escape, after they had been caught with so much trouble. The spectators soon dispersed; some of them returning to San Francisco, the rest betaking themselves to the various drinking-tents, to talk over the events of the day.

George and his companion also began to think of returning; it was scarcely half-past three o'clock, and they would have time to catch the steamer before it started. But they were anxious to have half an hour to spare, that they might have a good look at all the passengers who embarked.

First, of course, they went to the place where Hector had been tied up; and the poor brute, who had passed the last hour or two very uncomfortably, manifested most extravagant joy at seeing his master again. He sprang up at him, licked his hand, whined, howled, ran away, came tearing back, and barked and yelled as if he were mad. George could scarcely keep him off.

To get clear of the Mission was a very difficult matter. The news that the old man and the boy had killed the bear, and probably prevented serious mischief, had

flown with lightning speed from mouth to mouth; and every one who saw them hailed them, and was anxious in some way to show his friendly feeling. Resist as they would, they were obliged to go into a drinking-tent, to empty a glass in honour of their happy shot; and if the people could have had their will, they would have had to drink with each one separately.

At last they tore themselves away, almost by main force. Time was flying, and they durst not tarry longer. But the old man had informed one or two of the guests that the boy had lost his parents up in the snowy mountains, and was now going to San Francisco to seek out his father. That was quite enough to rouse the interest of all present in his behalf.

In California it was not then the fashion for people to content themselves with empty words and protestations of thanks. Money was so plentiful among them, that it played a prominent part on every occasion. Even at the dancing exhibitions of the Mexicans and Californians, the best female dancers had dollars and sometimes even ounces of gold thrown to them in token of the satisfaction of the audience, in addition to the usual applause; and here, too, one of the practical Americans hit soon upon a plan to show their gratitude to the boy.

Taking off his hat, he began to make a collection for the young marksman; and every one came crowding eagerly up, to contribute his quota to the general fund. In less than ten minutes the hat was half-full of dollars, among which glittered more than one golden piece; and when George seriously objected to the magnitude of the present, the subscribers became almost angry. It was of no use to refuse; they would not let him go till he accepted their gift.

The old man had looked on, smiling, in some emotion ; and when George looked inquiringly at him, he nodded to him, and said,—

“ You may take it, George ; the good people are glad to see such a young chap as you behave so well as you did to-day ; and what’s so freely offered may be thankfully accepted, especially here in California. Remember, too, it may help your parents.”

Blushing crimson at the many words of praise lavished upon him on all sides, and anxious to get away on any terms, the boy at last took the handsome collection, with sincere thanks ; but it was too much for him to carry, and his friend was obliged to make room for half in his blanket.

At last they were free to go ; it was past four o’clock, and laden as they were, they could not expect to be less than an hour and a half on the way. But the people were now really anxious that the boy should go, for fear he should miss the Sacramento boat ; and amid a last hurrah from the spectators the two friends went their way among the houses of the little Mission-town towards the road leading to San Francisco, by a bridge across the little stream which ran through the Mission.

They had just come to the brow of the hill whence the road led straight down towards the brook, when Hector, who had been jumping merrily round them, suddenly stopped short, and began snuffing the ground, and moving uneasily to and fro. George noticed this, but paid no attention to the dog’s movements ; for there was no chance of their finding any game on a path trodden by hundreds of people that day ; and moreover George had neither time nor inclination for hunting. So, without taking any further heed of the dog, they were about to

descend the hill, when Hector sprang back a pace or two, with a low whine, and then ran off at the top of his speed. George ran after him, shouting to him to come back; but he did not or would not hear; on the contrary, he rushed with increasing speed towards the bay; and the two travellers could not tell what to make of his sudden freak.

They had a fair view over the country, but could see nothing calculated to excite a dog, usually sober and steady, to such an untimely outburst. A few persons, evidently walking for pleasure, were moving to and fro in the warm rays of the afternoon sun. Some horsemen were trotting towards the Mission-house, and a little waggon, or rather a tilted cart, drawn by a single horse, and probably belonging to some party of emigrants proceeding towards the mines, came toiling slowly along the sandy road. Now the dog had come up to the cart, some five hundred paces in advance of the travellers; and now he jumped up at a man who had been walking beside the horse, and who stopped to caress him!

"Gracious Heaven!" exclaimed George, turning very pale; and the bundle he carried fell from his hand.

"George!—George!" a voice was heard shouting.

"Father!" cried George in reply; and scarcely knowing what he did, he threw down his rifle, and sped like an arrow towards the cart, and was clasped in the embrace of the man, who came running to meet him.

"Father!—father!" sobbed the boy, leaning on the shoulder of him whom he had sought and pined for so long; "father—my dear, dear father!"

"My George—my own boy—my good, brave, dear boy!" cried the man.

"And mother?" asked George anxiously, tearing

himself from the arms that tightly embraced him—"where is she—where?"

"There, in the cart."

George flew to the cart, from which his little sister was stretching out her arms to him, crying for joy; but his mother had sunk back in the arm-chair in which she sat, and lay with her eyes closed, her face pale, and her hands tightly clenched, and did not hear the cry of her child, whom she had almost given up for lost, and who now stretched out his arms anxiously towards her.

She had seen the dog, and recognized him, when he came bounding up—had heard the father's glad cry, and the boy's answering shout. How well she knew the dear sound of her child's voice, so wearily longed for through many a dreary day! But then she had sunk back fainting, and her son's caresses had to recall her to life.

Joy does not kill so easily as grief. The passionate kisses of her son soon restored her to consciousness; and when she awoke, and found herself in her George's arms, her joy and gratitude knew no bounds.

The father had, meantime, enough to do to keep off Hector, who leaped up at him with all his four feet at once, and would neither be controlled by caresses nor by menaces. The dog seemed perfectly beside himself; and when George's little sister clapped her hands, and called to him, he leaped into the cart with a single bound, overthrew the poor little girl, and then rushed towards his mistress, treading down everything in his way, and began to lick her face and hands. George was obliged at last to seize him forcibly, and turn him out of the cart.

A number of people had by this time collected round the group. They seemed to feel, however, that they had no right to intrude in a scene of such holy affection.

They soon dispersed again, leaving the happy family to rejoice together.

What a store of news there was to tell—what a number of questions to ask ! and yet not one of them knew where to begin. George sat in the cart in triumph beside his mother, with his little sister on his knee, and one hand locked in his mother's, while the other grasped that of his father, who stood by the cart leaning over them, radiant with joy.

In a few hurried sentences his father related how he had first intended, upon hearing that George was in Yuba city, to leave his wife and daughter with a former neighbour in San Francisco ; considering, however, that if he did so, he would be compelled to return to San Francisco, and as it became absolutely necessary that he should work to earn money, he determined to take them with him, and was actually on his way to Sacramento when George happily met him.

"And ~~we~~ were just going down to the steamer to meet you. What a fortunate thing that Hector found you out, father ; we should certainly have missed one another again."

"I should have been glad enough to go by the steamer," said his father ; "for in San Francisco they told me I should not be able to get through the Joaquin marshes with my cart—at any rate, not after the rainy season set in. But California has run away with my money, almost to the last cent, and we shall have to work bravely to get any money at all."

"Money !" repeated George, completely dizzy with the crowd of thoughts that came whirling through his brain—"Money ! But, whatever have I been about ? I'd quite forgotten my old friend, who has been a father

to me this long time—I was so glad at seeing you again! I wonder why he has not followed me.”

“Whom do you mean?” asked his father.

“An old man whom I met by chance up in the mountains, and who has been a fast friend to me this long time. But have you found out my grandfather?”

“No,” answered his father in a low voice, and his mother sighed deeply; “not a soul in San Francisco seems to know him. If he really is alive, and in California, he must be somewhere up in the mines—and we’re going there too.”

“With my mother and my poor little sister?” cried George in horror. “My dear father, they’ll never be able to bear it.”

“We *must*, my poor boy,” replied his father gravely. “Where should I get a home for them here? and how am I to earn money to——”

“But you need not earn any money at all,” interrupted George hastily, while tears of joy filled his eyes; “I have money—plenty of money,” he continued, laughing and crying at once, as he stroked his mother’s hand caressingly—“money enough for us to set up something really good.”

“You have?” cried his father in astonishment. “Where did you get it?”

“I’ll tell you all about that afterwards,” said George gleefully; “but, first of all, we must get back to San Francisco, so that mother and sister need not sleep in the open air again, and then we’ll talk over our plans with my old friend, who knows California well.”

“What’s your friend’s name—and where is he now?”

“He’s got rather a strange name,” replied George, laughing; “his name’s False—but he’s got a true heart

for all that ; and now, in the joy of finding you again, I'd quite forgotten him—I suppose he's stopped behind to look after my rifle and my money."

The father paused for a moment—he scarcely knew what to make of his son's hurried and somewhat confused report. At last he turned the horse's head, and began to return towards the Mission, George still riding in the cart beside his mother, and Hector leaping round and round them, barking joyously.

When they came to the spot where George had left his old friend, he was gone, and had taken the bundle and the rifle with him ; but when, in some surprise, George sprang from the cart to look after him, old False appeared at the top of the opposite hill, towards San Francisco, contentedly carrying the heavy baggage all alone.

"There he is !" exclaimed George joyfully. "He'll be sure to wait for us up there. He has already seen us turn round with the cart."

The little vehicle now again descended the hill, forded the stream some twenty paces above the bridge, and then resumed the way to San Francisco. But the old man had not waited for them at the top of the first hill,—he had gone on to the next, which overlooked the Mission, and where the bushes began. Here he sat down, deposited his load beside him, and wiped the perspiration from his forehead.

The road was by this time nearly deserted ; only here and there a solitary horseman was seen hurrying along.

The cart could only proceed very slowly up the steep ascent ; and even George's mother had alighted and walked behind it, leaning only on George's arm, and

holding her little daughter by the hand. George was giving her a hurried sketch of his adventures; and she was supremely happy in seeing her beloved child, whom she had almost given up for lost, marching beside her, and listening to the cheery tones of his voice.

Thus they at length gained the summit of the hill, from which the road wound downwards for a little way, and became somewhat easier. There sat the old man, a little aside from the road, by the two bundles and rifles, awaiting their approach. George thought he looked unusually pale, and kept his eyes fixed on the ground before him.

George's father had learned enough from his son on the way, to be aware how much gratitude he owed the old man. So he led the horse a little aside from the usual track, so as to be out of the way of any approaching vehicle or rider; and then, throwing the bridle over the neck of the patient beast, they left him, and went all together towards old False.

"That's the man, father," cried George, as they came up, "without whose help I should hardly have found you again in this strange place. That's the man who has behaved towards me as if he had been my own father."

The old man had stood up, and George's father hastened towards him, seized his hand, and shook it warmly, saying in a tone of deep emotion,—

"My dear sir, I don't know how in the world I'm to thank you properly for all you have done for my boy there. At any rate you may like to receive the heartfelt thanks of people whom you have made more happy than they can express."

The old man held the proffered hand firmly clasped in his own, and looked keenly at the speaker, with his clear

eyes, but he said not a word; and presently his glance wandered to the woman.

She, for her part, hastened towards him, to press his hand, and add her thanks to her husband's; but suddenly she paused, her outstretched hand remained extended in the air, and her eyes were fixed with an earnest, almost a frightened gaze upon the stranger.

Then he put out both his arms, seized her hands in his, and murmured in a low voice,—

“Mary!”

“Father, father!” cried the poor woman joyfully, and the next moment she was sobbing on his neck.

“My grandfather?” exclaimed George, scarcely knowing whether he was awake or asleep, in the mingled tumult of astonishment and joy—“is *that* my grandfather? And to think that he never told me a word about it, but let me go looking for my grandfather all over San Francisco, like a needle in a bottle of hay!”

“My child—my own dear child!” murmured the old man, kissing his daughter's forehead again and again, as she clung to him. Then, still holding his daughter in his arms, he stretched out his hand again to George's father and cried heartily,—

“Welcome to California, John Oakley. The father of such a brave fellow as your George must be a good man; and I thank God for bringing us together—to remain together to the end, I hope.”

“My dear, dear father!” sobbed George's mother.

“Heaven pardon the bad people who have, for their own ends, sown dissension between us!” continued the old man; “but, after all, everything has been made to work for our good. But you shan't have any more difficulty about the means for taking a farm now—leave old

Hardy alone for that ; besides, the youngster yonder has laid a foundation to begin upon."

The two men shook hands heartily once more ; then George's grandfather held out his hand to him, and said,—

"Well, my lad, we shall have to go back to Sacramento, after all, I reckon, though we needn't exactly start to-day, for we must fetch away the pony and Musquito ; it wont do to leave them in the lurch, eh ?"

"But, grandfather," cried George, in a tone of merry reproach, "how could you tell me your name was False ?"

"Well, my lad, at the time I gave you my name, didn't I tell you it was *False* ?"

"Ah!—that's the way you meant it ?" said the boy. "Yes—I certainly didn't understand that."

And now the old man took up little Mary, who was not in the least afraid of him, and kissed and hugged her, and jokingly called her his little Californian ; and the sun was already touching the horizon before the happy party thought of proceeding.

The money and the rifles were now put in the cart, and the little girl placed there too, as it would have been too much exertion for her to wade through the deep sand ; and on the way George's father told them how he came to leave the waggon, so that George had not been able to find him. The case was simple enough.

While he had been waiting for George another belated waggon had overtaken him ; and as the weather became worse and worse, and more and more snow fell, while George's mother appeared to be seriously ill, his father had not felt justified in refusing the kind offer of the proprietor to take them with him. He would willingly

have remained behind alone, to wait for his boy, but he could not leave his wife. That George might know where they had gone, he fastened a paper to the corner of the abandoned waggon, promising to wait for him at the mouth of the Feather river, which flows into the Sacramento. Unfortunately, a wandering tribe of Indians had come upon the waggon; and we have already seen how these illiterate sons of the wilderness had torn half of it away and used it as a head-dress.

George had ridden, in company with his benefactor, past the very spot where his parents were waiting for him; and on his return he had missed them, because they had crossed over to the other side of the river to find an easier road.

That they had not been able to get any tidings of the grandfather in San Francisco was explained by the fact that he did not belong to the place at all, and had no possession there. But in San José, formerly the second town in California, he had a capitally-arranged farm, and had only given it up for a time to a manager's care, to go and meet his children, if they came across the mountains, or, at any rate, to obtain tidings of them.

The direction which George's father had taken, by the left bank of the Sacramento, was quite the wrong one, as the man who refused to help George found to his cost, when his waggon fell down an abyss. The waggon in which George's parents had pursued their journey had crossed the stream, and proceeded down the left valley, which had caused them to find a better road, but to miss George.

But now all was past; all sorrow, all toil was forgotten; and the happy party returned with light hearts to San Francisco.

From that hour the old man insisted on taking entire charge of them. In spite of the remonstrances made by George's father, he had them installed in a good hotel, and brought them a good supply of linen and clothes.

Three days afterwards the little caravan set out on their journey, past the Mission, to San José; and there they took possession of grandfather's farm, which was now to be worked by all of them together.

The old man first, however, left them alone for a day or two, while he rode over to Sacramento, to bring back his pony and Musquito, and to sell their tent and the rest of their effects. Then they lived happily through the rainy season—the Californian winter—on the farm, and forgot all the suffering and sorrow the weary separation had caused them.

George worked industriously at whatever was going on, and seemed to have quite accustomed himself to his old agricultural life. But when spring came again, and brought with it fresh reports of newly-discovered mines, he began to grow restless and unsettled, and to speak of trying his luck once more. He could not forget how they had found the great lump of gold.

His father did not approve of his project; but his grandfather laughed, and said,—

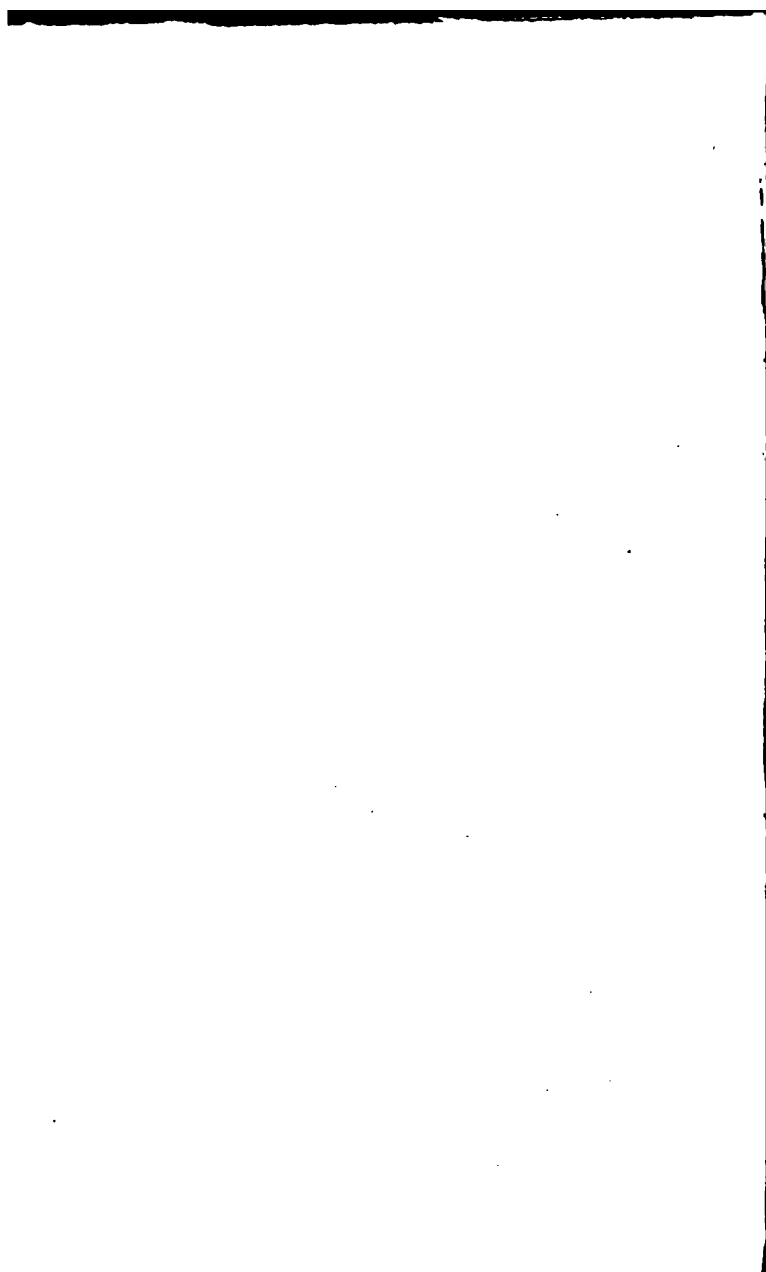
“Let him go. That's the best way to sicken him of the mines, where he may dig long enough before he finds a second lump like the one we turned up.”

He, moreover, gave him Musquito, to carry his baggage, and sent one of the farm-labourers with him, on whom he could depend, so that George was well found, and provided with everything necessary for a gold-seeking expedition. But the old man had judged rightly.

For two months the adventurers stayed in the mountains, labouring cheerfully and diligently; but though they certainly earned enough to keep them, fortune would not smile upon them as it had upon George last year. Moreover, he was seized by home-sickness,—for now he had a home, to which he longed to return. His companion had also been in the mountains before, and had not been more successful than he was now. So, when the two found that they could earn at home, by quiet, steady industry, as much, if not more than their labour yielded them here, without the necessity of enduring so much hardship and privation, they gave up digging, sold their tent and tools to a party of fresh adventurers, and returned to the farm, where they were received with a joyful and hearty welcome.

From that time George has not quitted his parents again. Agriculture became more and more practised in California; and as he devoted himself zealously to helping his father and grandfather in their labours in the field, the little miner became in time a thoroughly intelligent and practical farmer, beloved and respected by neighbours and friends, and the pride and joy of his parents.

THE END.



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